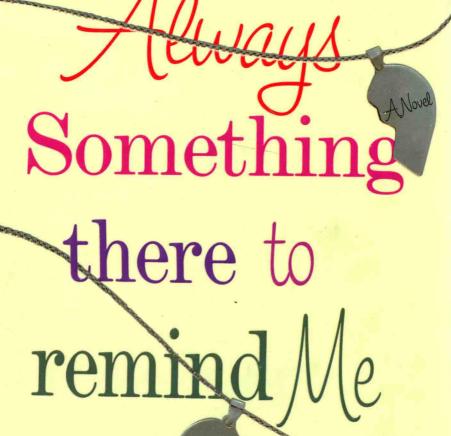
## beth harbison

New York Times Bestselling Author of shoe addicts and Thin, Rich,



## Beth Harbison

Always Something There to Remind Me

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Always Something There to Remind Me

## Also by Beth Harbison

Shoe Addicts Anonymous

Secrets of a Shoe Addict

Hope in a Jar

Thin, Rich, Pretty

To him, of course

Always Something There to Remind Me

# Prologue

I could tell you what he looked like—his height and physique and the way the contours of his body felt close to mine in the dark; the shape and exact color of his eyes and how they looked when he was happy, sad, pissed, or passionate; the lines of his forearms, biceps, shoulders, and elbows; the curve of his lips and the feel of his mouth against mine; and what his back, and hips, and legs felt like beneath my fingertips. I could tell you what he smelled like and what he tasted like. I could pick his voice out in the crowd at Times Square on New Year's Eve.

Even twenty-three years after the end, I could close my eyes and remember every detail of him, as clearly as if he were right in front of me.

But what would be the point in describing all that? All it would do—all it could possibly do—is diminish the whole into a rearrangement of features you would never see the way I saw them. He'd sound like your neighbor, or your brother, or that guy you

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work with, or some other person you couldn't possibly imagine inspiring an unending ache in someone's heart.

Everyone has a first love, one person they never completely got over, right?

Picture yours.

Because when you come down to it, it isn't really anything about the way they look that distinguishes them in your memory—hair color, physical shape, style—it can all change with time. It's the way you remember *feeling* when you looked at them.

When I looked at him, I felt real, unconditional love.

And I felt completely loved.

He was the only person I ever met whose soul I could clearly see in his eyes.

And I had more faith in him than I've ever had in another human being.

After I lost him, on the rare occasions when I saw him, I could feel the shape, the moving embodiment, of the hole in my heart.

Not that my life was about that. I moved on, of course. Dated, worked, ate, drank, laughed, cried. Had a child. Things happen, life goes on, and you have to keep moving and think about what's in front of you or you'll go insane.

So I pushed the part of me that belonged to him way beneath the surface.

Just like he did with me.

No one would ever have imagined this part of me existed at all, that a piece of my heart deep down was broken beyond repair, or that *that* guy—the guy who could have been *anyone* (or no one) to you or the rest of the world—was the cause of it all.

He was the only guy I was ever truly in love with. It took me years to move on.

Then he came back.

## Chapter 1

#### March 1985

The music throbbed—John Cougar singing about Jack and Diane, drums pounding his point and rattling the windows—and Erin Edwards scanned the smoke-filled room, half hoping to see him, half terrified to see him.

Todd Griffith. The cutest guy in school. Classic in every way: dark hair, amber eyes that looked green in the right light, square jaw, great mouth, powerful body. He was beautiful to look at and also athletic, which was the only thing that kept him from being universally coveted at Benson Prep School, since there was a contingent of freaky pothead girls at school who weren't interested in anyone their parents would approve of.

But the guys were afraid of him, without exception. Which made him even more appealing.

No doubt about it. Todd Griffith was perfect.

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But Todd wasn't who Erin was here to see. The guy Erin was really looking for . . . he'd be with Todd.

"Is he here?" her friend Jordan Tyler asked at her elbow. She was thinking Todd because that was who Erin had liked first.

"He's got to be."

Jordan squinted and scanned the room. "I don't see him. And I think that's good because, Erin, he's kind of a jerk. No offense."

Erin was only half paying attention to Jordan. "Who, Todd?"

"Yes, Todd. Who else are we talking about? You went out with him one time three months ago and all he did was try to get into your pants." Jordan raised an eyebrow. "Then he told everyone you gave him a blow job. I don't know how you can stand him after that."

Erin nodded. "But I'm not *sure* he said that. That's just what David Rutley said, and *he's* a jerk." There was no denying that David Rutley was a jerk, but she did half wonder why Todd hadn't set the record straight if he really hadn't said it. All the guys were cowed by him, it would have been nothing for him to just tell them to lay off. They would have fallen in line like baby ducks, just like they did anytime he said anything else.

"Okay. . . ." Jordan looked dubious. "Whatever. Oh!"

Erin turned, startled. "What?"

Jordan frowned. "Well." She pointed. "Todd's here."

Sure enough, he was. Along with a group of guys, including David Rutley and a couple of others Erin didn't recognize, as well as a sleazy-looking girl with dark hair, teased high and sprayed into a style that made her look like a Mafia girlfriend.

The girl wasn't even pretty. It was so obvious what he wanted from her. She was rounded, with huge boobs and a big butt, and a big round face that he probably put up with to get the rest. Without even talking to her, Erin knew her type, knew exactly what kind of girl she was.

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But that's what Todd was all about. She'd known it ever since she'd heard the rumors of her blowing him.

She was over him.

Maybe he'd have better luck with this girl.

"Wow, who's the slut?" Jordan whispered.

"Just his type," Erin said.

"Aren't you glad you didn't do anything more than kiss him?"

"Yes." Erin wasn't interested in playing that game. She suspected—or hoped, anyway—the other guy wasn't like that.

Unfortunately, he didn't seem to be here.

"Are you going to say something to him?" Jordan asked, indicating Todd and his date.

Erin shook her head. "No point."

Jordan nodded like she understood. But she didn't. Not yet. "Good call. Do you want a beer?"

Normally she wouldn't. Erin hated beer. But she and Jordan had a ride home with Jordan's older sister, who was at the movies until after midnight, so it wasn't like Erin's mom was going to smell it on her breath before she got to brush her teeth. Plus she wouldn't mind having a little liquid courage in order to socialize with all these people.

"Yes," she said. It was going to be a dull party after all. "Thanks." Jordan gave her a pat on the shoulder and headed for the keg, leaving a waft of Jōvan musk trailing behind her.

"Somebody's Baby" by Jackson Browne came over the speakers.

That's when Erin saw him.

Him.

The one she'd been hoping to see.

Todd's best friend.

She knew who he was because he'd come to baseball games now and then when Todd was playing and she'd asked someone about him. The story was that he was a fighter, mean as a snake and twice as aggressive as Todd, but he looked mild and sweet to Erin.

Which itself was intriguing.

They'd grown up together, they were practically brothers. They even kind of looked alike, only his build was slighter, his hair lighter, his overall look just a little less immediately striking. But he had amazing eyes. Large and kind. The sort of eyes that made people toss around terms like *old soul*.

She found him both compelling and disconcerting at the same time. From the first time she'd seen him, his image had been emblazoned on her mind, and when he stepped into view it was as if her mind closed over it like a trap. She didn't want to think about him, but she couldn't stop.

His eyes met hers and something clicked.

She backed away involuntarily, knocking into a warm body.

"Erin!" It was Jordan, holding two opaque plastic cups of beer. There was quite a bit of it on her sweater now too.

"I'm sorry!"

Jordan touched the large wet spot on her top. "Oh, my God, I'm going to reek now!"

"Go rinse really quick," Erin said. "It won't be any wetter than the beer, but then it won't stink. Come on, I'll wear your shirt and you can wear mine since it's dry."

"No, that's too much trouble."

"It's not that big a deal. Really." Erin imagined she could feel his eyes on her back and all of her systems were running on high. She had to run away or she was going to run right to him and everyone would think she was a psychopath. "Let's go." She led Jordan to the bathroom and closed the door behind them.

Jordan pulled off her sweater and started rinsing the spot in the sink. "What's going on? Who are you hiding from?"

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"No one." Erin pulled her shirt off and waited for Jordan to hand over the wet sweater. "Todd's friend."

"Todd's *friend*?" She wrung out her sweater and handed it to Erin, taking the shirt. "Which one?"

"You don't know him."

"What are you talking about? I don't know him but you do?"

"No. But." But what? She felt like she did? That sounded stupid. Something about him made her want to run to him and away from him in equal measure. "He's Todd's best friend, so . . ."

Jordan nodded sagely as she strained to pull the buttons together across her chest. "So stay the fuck away."

"Yeah." Erin thought about his eyes and her breath quickened. "Far away." She dabbed at the sweater she was now wearing with a dry hand towel to blot the excess moisture.

They grabbed their beers and returned to the party, where Erin spent the next fifteen minutes straining to find him again in the crowded haze but didn't see him. She downed her beer and went to refill it.

When she turned around, he was right there.

"Oh!" She laid a hand to her chest.

The song changed abruptly to "Dreams" by Fleetwood Mac.

He looked at her directly. "Hi."

Good teeth, she noted. That was important. Straight. White. Masculine. Not like Paul Dyson in her math class, who looked like he still had his baby teeth.

"Hi." She gave a flustered smile. It was instantly obvious that she wasn't going to be able to play this cool. "I... I'm sorry, I don't know your name...?" Did that sound even *remotely* true?

"Nate Lawson."

"I'm Erin." She drank some beer.

He smiled. "I know."

"How do you— Oh." He'd been there the night she was with Todd on that one date. She was reasonably sure she'd been a topic of some conversation after they'd dropped her off, though she was equally sure the accuracy of that conversation was low. "You're Todd's friend, right?" Arrgh! Stupid again. She sounded like she was trying to sound so casual that he'd have to be blind not to see right through it!

"Right."

Silence stretched between them.

"You don't go to Benson," she pointed out. Like there was any question as to whether or not she'd know him in a school of just over a hundred students.

He shook his head. "I go to Churchill."

"Hm." She nodded, as if that were something worth mulling over. "Are you here with someone?" she asked, suddenly self-conscious that she sounded both hyperactive and overinterested.

Her mouth was dry, so she drank more beer. It tasted terrible.

She didn't care, she drained it.

He looked at her curiously. "No. Well, with them." He indicated Todd and their friends.

She looked, as if she didn't know who he meant. She was getting a little light-headed. "Oh. Yeah."

What was it about this guy that made her so uncool?

"Have you known Todd long?"

"Since first grade. We went to school together, played on the same baseball team . . . you name it. We've known each other forever."

She nodded, unsure what to say to that.

He looked at her empty cup. "Do you want another beer?"

She looked at the cup too, like it was surprising to find it empty. "Sure. Thanks."

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He reached for it, lightly brushing her fingers with his hand, and took it over to the keg. She waited, standing awkwardly in the one spot, her heart pounding stupidly. He returned shortly and handed her the full cup. She noticed he had gotten one for himself too. "So who are you here with?" he asked.

"My friend Jordan. She's—" She looked around to point her out. "Suddenly not here."

"I think I saw her with you when I came in."

"Probably." He'd noticed her when he came in? That was good. Wasn't it? It's not like she was being loud and sloppy and calling attention to herself.

Someone turned up the music. Billy Joel's "Only the Good Die Young." Erin hoped to God he didn't ask her to dance. Of the many things she was not good at, dancing was at the very top of the list.

So naturally the next thing she heard from him sounded like him asking her to dance.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said, shaking her head, feeling the heat rise in her face. "I'm not really into that."

He looked at her quizzically.

She'd made a mistake. Clearly. "I'm sorry, I must have misunder-stood. What did you say?"

This time it sounded like, Are you almost done?

Done?

Done with what? Was she supposed to be doing something?

"Done with what?" She leaned in closer and felt a buzz of energy sizzle between them. She could smell the leather of his coat, which he hadn't taken off.

"I asked if you were having fun." Wow, he had a nice voice, now that she could actually hear him. Really husky and low. Sexy.

"Oh." She relaxed fractionally. "Yes!" That sounded too eager. "I guess. Are you?"

"Now." He held her gaze for a minute, then his face colored a little and he looked away.

That's when she got it.

He was nervous talking to her!

Suddenly she felt a little braver. "Do you want to go outside and talk?" she asked, like she was the kind of girl who was comfortable suggesting that sort of thing. In truth, she was kind of desperate to get away from the noise and smoke and the embarrassment of repeatedly asking, *What*?

"Sure."

"Cool."

He signaled Todd, who looked from him to Erin and then back at Nate with a funny look she couldn't quite read.

"He's competitive," Nate said, in answer to her unasked question. "You're part of his domain."

"But I'm not!"

Nate laughed. "Don't worry about it. That's just Todd."

She could believe it. Todd was exactly the sort to only be interested in her if she was interested in his friend. God knows he hadn't demonstrated any interest in her after their one and only "date."

She led Nate to the front door, stopping to grab her pitifully thin jacket from the back of a chair on the way. It was going to be little protection against the elements, particularly since she was wearing a wet sweater. As soon as she stepped outside, she was cold. Really cold. Their breath came out in icy white clouds. It was frigid even for a February night.

"I'm going to die," she announced on a quivering white puff of breath. The wind lifted and blew her hair across her face in ghostly pale strands. She pushed it back and sniffed in the frigid air.

He laughed. "Do you want my coat?"