

## Diary of a Stepmom

May 15, 2004 The coffee shop was so busy this morning! People began pouring in as soon as I unlocked the doors and didn't stop until after noon. Finally, I was able to sit down and enjoy my own cup of white chocolate mocha when the most handsome man I ever seen walked through the doors. He was tall and lean, with blond wavy hair and dressed to kill in his black business suit. I smiled flirtatiously at him and to my pleasure he returned the same smile. I hopped up from my chair and ran over, excusing Vanessa to her break. She looked confused until she saw that beautiful man standing at the counter. Luckily, we had made our best-friend pack: First come, first serve! The man ordered a tall latte and I challenged myself to make the best latte he had ever had. When I handed the coffee to him, I looked straight into the bluest eyes I had ever seen. It wasn't until he asked "How much" that I realized I had been staring at him for some time. I handed him his change and he gave me another gorgeous smile. I batted my lashes at him and leaned over the counter, knocking over my sample tray of non-fat caramel lattes. Vanessa ran over with a rag and I took off to my office. I'm such a dork! I bet he'll be getting his coffee at Starbucks after that comedic performance.

May 26, 2004 Matt asked me to marry him last night. He looked so sincere and sweet, I hated to tell him no, but I had to. He wants two kids and a dog behind a white picket fence and I just don't ever want any of that. He was so mad; I don't think I had seen him that upset in the whole 8 months we've been together. He went on about how selfish I am and that all I care about is myself and my coffee shop. I tried to tell him that I cared about him and that I just want to focus on my business, not a screaming baby. But he didn't want to hear it; he told me we were done and left. And just like that, it was over.

May 30, 2004 The day started out awful. I splattered coffee all over my shirt, spilled milk on the counter and onto a lady's purse (needless to say, she got a week's worth of free coffee). But the icing on the cake was the call from my mother. She had talked to Matt and he told her everything. (Oh I could hurt him for that!) She started in on me about how I'm not getting any younger and that no man was going to marry me if I don't give him children. I told her to butt out—I'm 27 and old enough to make my own decisions. Of course that ticked her off enough to hang up on me. Whatever.

April 7, 2004 Guess what? The handsome man from a couple of weeks ago came in again today. I frantically tried to figure out a way to talk to him (without making a fool of myself this time) but I was at a loss. When he pulled his wallet out to pay me, I noticed a picture of a cute little girl in it. Using it as the perfect opportunity to start a conversation, I asked him who she was. When he told me it was his daughter, I couldn't help being disappointed. It never occurred to me that he was married. Of course, most gorgeous men are taken, right? Vanessa teased me for the rest of the day, telling me that it was time to get me out since I kept striking out with "Beautiful Stranger" as she so cleverly nicknamed him. Maybe I do need a night out...

April 22, 2004 Vanessa and I went out last night for ladies night at the new club in town. I had such a fabulous time! I danced, drank margaritas and flirted, flirted, flirted! After the club, we went to an all night restaurant for some food. Just as we were sitting down, a friend of ours, John, came in. To my surprise, he was with "Beautiful Stranger"! I saw the look in Vanessa's eye and before I could stop her she was waving them over to our table. They came over and accepted her offer to sit down. John introduced "Beautiful Stranger" to us as Adam, who sat took the seat across from me. I was at first nervous, but that soon went away as Adam started asking me about the coffee shop (which is my favorite subject) and seemed quite impressed to find out that I own it. He told me that he is a agent at John's real estate company and I learned that he is 39, divorced and shares custody of his 8 year old daughter, Kayla, with his ex wife. We talked and talked until we noticed that John and Vanessa looked very bored. So we all said goodbye and left. I was a little bummed but I had a small suspicion that I would be seeing Adam again.

April 27, 2004 Well, I was right—Adam came into the coffee shop today and not only did he leave me a huge tip, but he left his cell phone number in my tip jar! I called him when I got off of work and we decided to meet for dinner and drinks. It was so much fun! I never laughed so much in my life. Adam is funny, charming and so sweet. We made another date for this weekend. I cannot wait!

May 9, 2004 Adam and I are going on our fifth date tonight. I can't believe how wonderful he is! He is not like any other man I have ever dated. He's sweet, considerate of my feelings and actually listens to me! On top of all that, he's gorgeous! I feel so different when I'm with him. It's like nothing I've ever felt.

May 18, 2004 I went to Mom's today for lunch and I told her about Adam. She was pleased to hear that I was at least dating someone with a child, so "there is hope for me" as she put it. I told her not to get her hopes up—I don't want my own kids, much less anyone else's. Just dating a man, or even marrying him, doesn't mean it affects my life.

May 26, 2004 I invited Adam to over to my house for a BBQ today. he said he had Kayla so I told him he could bring her along too. She is really a sweet girl and I enjoyed her company so much, but I didn't realize how having a child around changes the dynamics of things. It's hard to watch your language after a few beers! I think she had fun playing with my cat and entertaining Adam and me. I think she likes me already. It will be hard getting to know her since Adam only has her two nights a week and every other weekend. I don't plan on spending much time with her anyway.

June 1, 2004 I'm in my office at the coffee shop when I hear some woman asking Vanessa if she is me. So I go out there and tell her that I'm the one she's looking for and she starts yelling at me to stay away from her daughter. I ask her what she's talking about and she says that she's Donna, Kayla's mother, and that I have no right to be around Kayla. The lady threatened me with a lawsuit if I go near Kayla again! I had customers staring like deer in headlights! I called Adam after Donna left and he told me not to worry about it and he'd take care of it. I was really scared, but Adam called back and said he had talked to her and told her to leave me alone. What a psycho! Adam reassured me that it wouldn't happen again but who can be certain? I've read about ex wives that are crazy like this. I don't want any part of that!

June 19, 2004 I'm so angry with Adam right now! We had plans to out on a date tonight and he brought Kayla with us. He said Donna had something come up and asked him to watch Kayla for a little while. This is the second time Donna has done this week. How can Adam be so clueless to her manipulation? It always seems like he gives into her every whim, even if it means sacrificing my feelings and our time together. It just makes me so resentful. I guess I'll just pretend like it doesn't bother me. I don't want to

seem like I don't like Kayla. Ugh! I'm so upset! June 22, 2003 Adam's parents invited us over for dinner at their house last night. They seem to be really nice people, but I couldn't help but notice the many pictures of Adam and Donna around the house. There were pictures of their wedding, of them with Kayla and even some of just Donna on the refrigerator door. I guess it's easy to say that Donna is still very special to them. I also noticed early on why Kayla is somewhat spoiled. She was clearly the center of attention by everyone (except me) all evening. She wasn't like this at my BBQ. I was glad when we finally left. If I didn't like Adam so much, I think I'd be done after tonight. June 30, 2004 Kayla was out of school today and Adam asked me if she could hang out with me at the coffee shop for a few hours so he could show a house. I really didn't want her to, but I figured it's really for Adam so I'd do it for him. At first she was being good, and then she started saying she was bored. Over and over and over again. So I walked her over to the game room at the mall and let her play a few games. She got mad when it was time to leave and pouted all the way back to the coffee shop. Thinking like a genius (or so I thought) I ordered a pizza for us and when it came, she said she hates pizza and wanted a happy meal. I just wanted her to keep her happy so I went and got her a freaking happy meal and she hardly ate any of it. So when I wouldn't let her have a cookie from my bakery counter, she started crying and saying how mean I am. I didn't know what to do! So I just gave her the cookie. All I needed was for her to tell her mother that I made her cry. I was so glad when Adam finally showed up. There's just no pleasing that kid. July 4, 2004 This was a crazy day. Vanessa was sick so I had to work the morning rush at the coffee shop all by myself. Luckily, Adam came by for coffee and he grabbed an apron and got to work. Of course, he had no idea what he was doing, but it's just like him to do anything to make me happy. After work, I went to Adam's parent's house for a 4th of July celebration. His parent's were surprised to see me there; almost nervous. I soon realized why when Donna showed up. I think she was as surprised to see me as I was to see her. Things were quite tense, and we were both drinking like fish to take the edge off. Things seemed to be going smoothly until Donna finished off her fifth margarita and began making snide comments and even sexual innuendos to Adam. Right in front of me! But the icing on the cake was when she came right out and asked me in front of the whole party "what grade I was in". I told Adam I needed to leave and got the hell out of there. I'm tired of this whole scene. I can't take anymore disrespect from anyone else. July 8, 2004 I'm feeling down and lonely today. I've been thinking about everything and I'm so mixed up. I'm scared that I'm falling in love with Adam--who is so wonderful-- I just hate that he has all this baggage. I struggle with so many aspects of our relationship. First of all, I never wanted kids and if I start a life with Adam, I will be helping with a kid that's not even mine. Then there's Kayla's mother who hates me so much and is constantly telling Adam all kind of terrible lies about me. But the thing that makes me feel the worst is that I have this overwhelming feeling of jealousy over Adam and Kayla's relationship. It makes me crazy to see them snuggling or hugging. I hate myself for that! It's not normal! I just don't know how to change the way I feel. August 1, 2005 With determination to do something fun, I took Adam and Kayla camping this weekend. I usually love to camp, but this proved to be extra challenging. Kayla didn't like any of the meals I made, she didn't want to go on a hike and she cried for two hours when Adam wouldn't let her sleep in the truck instead of in the tent with us. She was acting like a little brat! The worst part was when we were sitting around the campfire, Adam snuggled with Kayla. It made me feel so jealous and left out. When we came back home and took Kayla to her mother's, I was secretly happy to see her go back and have Adam all to myself. August 10, 2004 Adam and I had the worst fight. We had been at his parent's house (which wouldn't be so bad if I didn't have to look at his ex wife's face every time I opened the fridge) and Kayla didn't eat a bite of her lunch. Then she threw a fit on the way home to have a milkshake. Of course, Daddy bought his precious angel a milkshake. By the time we got home, I was so irritated, I could hardly speak. I told Adam I needed to go and just got in my car and left. He called me later and I just blew up. I told him that I hated that his parents were always talking about Donna, how Kayla was a spoiled brat and how I was sick of feeling like a "nonperson" when Kayla was around. Adam called me selfish and said I needed to deal with my problems before we could move on. He just doesn't get it! Maybe I overreacted, but this is not just my issue! August 15, 2004 I asked Adam to go to couple's counseling with me and he agreed. It felt so good to know that he loves me enough to work this out with me. I think that Adam and I both have things that we need to work on for this relationship. I love him so much and I know that he loves me. I think that if he could realize my need to feel important and if I could learn to deal with my issues with Kayla, we could really make this work. I believe in us. September 12, 2004 Sorry, I haven't written in so long. My life is so busy. Between running a business, having a relationship and an instant child in my life, I barely have any time for myself anymore. I tried to talk about everything with Vanessa at the coffee shop today. I told her about the camping trip last month and the night at the fair when Adam spent the whole time doing only what made Kayla happy. Expecting her to agree with my negativity, she was looking at me so strangely during the whole conversation. I asked her why she was looking at me that way and she said she just hoped that her son didn't have to have a stepmother one day. I was appalled! My own best friend doesn't even understand me. Maybe it's me--maybe I'm just wicked. September 30, 2004 I think the counselor is really giving Adam and I great advice and on how to incorporate me into his life. We have had fewer issues since going there, but I still wish that there was someone I could talk to when I just need to vent. It's hard when we get into arguments or when Kayla gets me frustrated and there isn't anyone who understands where I'm coming from. It's so difficult, not having children of my own, to come into a relationship with someone who has children. I don't understand that parent/child bond. When Kayla does something that unnerves me, I tend to want to distance myself from her, where as Adam is over it in seconds. I don't understand the whole biological phenomenon. October 15, 2004 I've found the coolest website! It's for women who don't have children who are in relationships with men who do. I couldn't believe it--I posted about my situation and the women there were so understanding and supportive. They made me feel normal--like I wasn't alone anymore. I'm so happy I've found it! November 21, 2005 Adam and I finished therapy today. I feel hopeful about our situation. We have the tools now to make this family work and I

have my website to turn to whenever I'm feeling vulnerable. I hope that I can grow to love Kayla and that she can grow to love me too. Adam now knows that he has to make the biggest effort in bringing us together as a family. No more making decisions without consulting me, no more compromising our couple time together for Kayla. The most important thing for me to do is remember that Adam has a daughter that he's responsible for 50 percent of the time, and for Adam to remember my need to be a priority. We can do this...I know we can.