

Every Now and Then
I Fall Apart

Beauty...Icon...Mother:
the Erika Jane Girardi Story

by Corey Podell and Jamie Silberhartz

It was almost 3am; she had a rule to never eat past 8pm. It had been years since a carb passed her lips after sundown. Tonight, however, she was breaking more than one rule.

She glanced at the clock: 2:53am. Usually she'd be deep into her third REM cycle by now, but not tonight. Tonight was different.

She'd already sent Chef home and was left to her own devices. She had to find something to calm her anxiety. Erika opened the stainless steel double doors on the refrigerator. Each shelf was organized and labeled meticulously. She thumbed through the fresh farmer's market produce with her perfectly manicured hand. Chef kept the kitchen stocked: Chilean pomegranates, Icelandic kale, Serbian apples, and Egyptian kiwis lined the shelves. None of it looked appealing though. She wanted something naughty.

She knew Chef had a secret stash of goodies just for her, but had made him sign a non-disclosure agreement upon employment with a clause specifically dedicated to keeping secret the whereabouts of the junk food stash. Should she call Chef? After all, he was her ICE (in case of emergency) contact, and this most certainly felt like an emergency.

Erika took a deep breath and adjusted her bustier. She usually changed into her street caftan after a performance, but tonight she was in a rush. Even though San Francisco was only a 40-minute flight, it felt worlds away from home. Usually she was able to nap on the private jet Mr. Girardi named "The Pretty Mess," but tonight she was all nerves, pacing around the cabin, at one point stealing away to the bathroom to pick at her face, a bad habit she gave up back in her teens.

She tossed a bag of Peruvian lima beans to the side and smiled

to herself as she thought about her earlier performance. Four hundred gay men enveloped her in love, patting their pussies while singing along to every song. Erika Jayne had a great night, but Erika Girardi? Not so much.

She leaned her body against the island, catching her reflection in the oven. Man, she looked good. No one could ever believe she was 45 years old. It wasn't easy keeping that tush tight and taut, but she worked hard at it for her shows and, most especially, her man.

With her long blonde extensions and piercing blue eyes, Erika was a real-life Barbie doll. But right now she didn't feel like Barbie, a pop star, gay icon, or even a reality queen. No, tonight she just felt like a mom—a mom who was worried about her kid.

She had to get herself together. Erika was too close to submitting to Chef's secret stash. Her instincts said he hid it in the bottom drawer with the bread. And her instincts were never wrong. He knew she wouldn't go anywhere near the bread drawer, but goddamn, those delectable Bugles were calling her name. Bugles had been her solace since 7th grade when she got cut from field hockey. If there was ever a night to indulge, this was it.

She opened the bread drawer and, once again, she nailed it. There they were. Before she grabbed the bag, she made a mental note to fire Chef tomorrow. This was way too easy a find.

She began tearing it open, but stopped herself. She heard a voice, no more like an energy. Maybe it was her spiritual guides, her angels, the Virgin Mary, or her grandmother Ann who whispered for her to leave the kitchen. She heeded their warnings; the kitchen was not the space she needed to be in right now.

She thought about going to the library and talking to Calamari. Calamari was Erika's pet octopus and most trusted confidant. Octopi are known for being thoughtful, smart, and loyal. Sweet Calamari had already finished puzzles that stumped the brilliant Mr. Girardi. There is a very old saying—"pets take after their owners"—and Calamari was full of sass. Erika had the kind boys from Animal Planet over to build a custom tank for Calamari in the library bookshelves. Such a creature deserved to live among the classics. But Calamari was slightly sensitive; best not to stress her out.

Erika continued down the east wing, her custom-made Louboutin boots clicking along the cherry hardwood floors. She continued toward the light glowing from under the doorway to her sacred space, her chapel. Erika sighed and knelt down before the Virgin Mary statue Tom brought back from Buenos Aires, blessed by the Pope himself.

How long had it been since she'd prayed? Two years. Two years since she knelt down in her fishnets and prayed that God help with her first performance at Rage in West Hollywood. After that night, she never had a doubt; God listened. Hopefully that all-powerful cunt would listen again.

She asked God to keep him safe. He's just her little boy after all. Her 22-year-old son. Officer. Tears rush her eyes. When Tommy told her he wanted to be a police officer for the LAPD, she had never been more proud, or more worried. Erika knew this was his dream. And like any good mother, she supported him. Watching him graduate from the academy was one of the top five moments of her life. It was just as good as meeting Rihanna or breaking into iTunes's top 10 dance singles.

But tonight was his first night on patrol. Tonight she was the

mother of a police officer—a rookie—and she didn't like it. She raised a good man—a man who made the decision to spend his life protecting others. But goddamn it, tonight she wished he had just become a personal trainer or accountant.

Tearing off her fake eyelashes at the feet of the Holy Mother, she couldn't help but laugh. Her son and her husband—her son's stepfather—had a lot in common. Mr. Girardi was an attorney who spent his career fighting injustice. The fact that he was paid very handsomely for it was a nice perk. They were both civil servants, making the world a better place. Even with the eyelash glue stinging her eyes, it felt good. Or were those tears? No. She stopped crying years ago. But damn it, that eyelash glue was strong.

Erika stood up and took in her chapel one last time. She felt more at peace than before, and the Bugles had stopped calling her name, but she still wasn't ready for sleep. As she descended the staircase to the master bedroom, she thought to herself how everyone on Earth deserved to have a private chapel. If that could happen, the world would be a more peaceful place, for sure.

Safely in her boudoir, Erika went directly into her REAL chapel—the mother-fucking closet. She flipped on the lights and saw a space that was bigger than that first studio apartment she rented in Beverly Hills Adjacent over 20 years ago.

Back then life was a lot simpler; she had one closet and it didn't even have any proper shelving. Her clothing options consisted of clearance items from Nordstrom Rack and the Gap.

Now, it took her stylist several hours just to go through the right side of her shoe collection. Erika shook her head as she surveyed the glassed Birkins across from her. They were

princess problems, but problems nevertheless. Beautiful clothing surrounded her, but she might as well have been wearing that cheap Juicy knockoff she bought in '01.

She took a deep breath and pulled her mane into a chic topknot. Was there anything other than nostalgic junk food to make her feel better? The crystals, she thought, the crystals!

Two years ago her best friend Yolanda brought back healing crystals from Dubai, but...where had she put them? She was touched to receive them at the time, but never imagined she would actually use them. She found the amethyst gems on a shelf behind her new YSL number. Grabbing them, she sat down. Desperate times call for desperate measures.

Cradling them as Yolanda had showed her, she rocked back and forth, attempting to clear her mind. Yet every time she closed her eyes, she saw little Tommy. His childhood was a montage passing through her brain, with flashes of Bugles.

This healing shit was exhausting. She missed her baby, she missed her husband who wouldn't be back from a work trip till Tuesday, and her hunger was now audible—her stomach was making noises. It had stopped voicing its hunger years ago; decades of discipline will train anything. Holy shit, she thought, my body is falling apart!

Then, out of nowhere, she heard a loud sound that most definitely did not come from her body. An intruder? The panic room was in an entirely different wing. It would take her at least 18 minutes to walk there.

Then she realized that she'd been so distracted thinking about Tommy that she forgot to set the alarm. But she wasn't going to go lying down. She had always been a fighter.

Clutching the pointy part of the largest crystal, she began to tiptoe out of the closet. Another sound—footsteps, this time from beneath her. The intruder was in the library! Could he or she be coming for Calamari? Her Animal Planet episode had aired last night. Had a crazed viewer tracked them down?

Ready for battle, Erika stepped out to the hallway, peering down the staircase. Then she heard a sound she would recognize anywhere—the opening of the pantry. Had the criminals come to eat? Should she call Tommy? Maybe patrol would send him to her house.

She was all alone. Holding her breath, she started down the stairs, healing crystal in hand.

Then she saw the intruder from behind. He had silver hair and a stocky, yet manly, build. That was no enemy—it was Mr. Girardi. “Tom!” she cried, jumping into his arms.

“Hi baby,” he said, wiping her cheek. “I came home early. I missed you.”

“I'm so worried about Tommy! I still haven't heard from him. I want to know about his first night. I need to know he made it home.”

“Hun, his first night isn't till next Thursday.”

Erika slowly disengaged herself from her husband's embrace and began toward the kitchen.

“Where are you going?”

Not answering, she power-walked to the bread drawer, patted her puss, and opened the Bugles.