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The senior parking lot was already close to empty when the rain started. I sat inside Gert, watching the exit and hoping someone would come out soon. Unfortunately, the first person to appear, my would-be savior, was a tall boy in the T-shirt of an obscure band, a distressed but still clearly expensive hoodie, and two-hundred-dollar jeans.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” I said as I reached for the door handle. I wanted to just wait for the next person to come out, but who knew how long that would be. Chances were, the rest of these cars belonged to the overachieving types who stayed after school for chess club and student government. Those nerds and their resume-building activities were no good to me right now. So Ryder Cross was my only choice.

I hopped out of the car, holding my history textbook over my head to protect my curls from the downpour of doom.

“Ryder!” I shouted. He was already halfway across the parking lot. “Hey, Ryder!”

He stopped and turned to look at me. He didn’t have an umbrella, and the rain was making his clothes cling to him. The

view wasn't half bad. Unfortunately, however, my next question would require him to speak.

"My car's dead," I said. "Do you have jumper cables or something?"

He started walking in my direction, but he was shaking his head. "I don't."

I sighed. "Of course not. Let me guess, the cars in DC don't die? Or need repairs?"

"Can't you call someone?"

"My phone doesn't work."

"Seems like everything around you is faulty."

"Well, not everyone has politician parents to pay for our things. Some of us actually have to work for what we own. Your concern is appreciated, though."

He rolled his eyes. "If you're going to be like that, then forget it. I was going to let you use my phone."

"Really?"

"Yeah. I'm not an asshole."

"Debatable."

"You'd be calling Amy, right?"

And there it was. The ulterior motive I'd been expecting. He was right, though. Who else would I call? I knew she wouldn't have jumper cables, but she'd at least be able to give me a ride to the theater.

We climbed into Gert, both of us soaked. The carpeted seats would be brilliantly moldy the next day — something to look forward to. He handed me his phone, the same model as Amy's, and I quickly dialed her number. It was the only one I had memorized.

“Hello?”

“Hey, Amy.”

“Sonny? Where are you calling from? I don’t recognize the number.”

“Our favorite human being was kind enough to bestow the honor of telephone usage on me.”

Silence.

“I’m borrowing Ryder’s phone.”

“Oh.”

I didn’t have to see her face to know her tiny button nose had wrinkled.

“My car’s dead and my phone is broken. And my shift is in . . . oh, seven minutes. Please help.”

“On my way.”

I returned the phone to Ryder. “She’s coming back to get me. So you can go now.” And then, with every ounce of willpower I had, I forced myself to add, “And thanks. For the phone.”

He shrugged, but he didn’t move to get out of the car.

“Do you need something?” I asked.

“No. I just figured I’d stick around until Amy gets here . . . just to see you off safely.”

I snorted. “Oh, yes. I’m sure my safety is a priority of yours. Stop wasting your time with this crush on Amy. It’s annoying and pathetic and, if you want the truth, she’s not into you. At all.”

“Sorry. I didn’t realize you spoke for Amy now.”

“I’m her best friend. I know how she feels about pretty much everything. I’m just trying to save you the heartbreak.”

“You care about my heartbreak about as much as I care about

your safety.” He shook his head. “I’d rather hear Amy’s feelings from Amy, if you don’t mind.”

“You won’t. As much as she can’t stand you, she wouldn’t tell you that. She’s too nice.”

“Clearly it hasn’t rubbed off on you.”

A second later, Amy’s Lexus turned the corner into the parking lot. I grabbed my bag and climbed out of the station wagon, Ryder not too far behind me. Amy slid into a parking space, and I heard the click of the passenger-side door being unlocked.

“Later,” I said, hopping into the Lexus, but Ryder grabbed the door, sticking his head into the cab before I could close it.

“Hello, Amy,” he said.

“Oh. Hi, Ryder.”

“How are you?”

“I’m fine.”

“Which is code for ‘annoyed,’” I said.

She elbowed me.

“Sorry for the inconvenience,” he said. “It was really nice of you to come back and get Sonny.”

“Of course. Thank you for letting Sonny use your phone to call.”

“*Sonny* is right here,” I said. “And I already thanked him.”

“So, Amy, are you doing anything this weekend?” Ryder asked.

Amy glanced at me, her eyes widening in a way that clearly meant, *Oh, dear God, help me get away from him.*

“Um . . . I don’t know,” she said.

“Well, we should —”

“Go,” I interjected. “I can see you’re trying to court my lovely friend here —”

Ryder flustered.

“— but it’s raining and you’re holding the door open and getting my right side soaked in the process.”

“And she’s late for work,” Amy added.

“That, too.”

“Right. Sorry about that. I guess I’ll see you at school Monday?”

“Probably,” Amy said.

“Excellent. See you around.”

Ryder stepped back, but he held the door open for just a second longer, ensuring the right leg of my jeans was thoroughly drenched before he closed the door. I glared at him out the window. Somehow, he didn’t seem to mind that he was sopping wet. And from a purely aesthetic perspective, I didn’t mind that he was either.

“Why must someone so handsome be such an ass?” I asked as Amy pulled out of the parking lot.

“All of the handsome ones are,” she said.

“Not your brother.”

“He used to be.”

Amy’s brother, Wesley, was a few years older than us. He’d been blessed with the same godlike DNA as the rest of the Rush family. He had the same dark, curly hair as Amy, the same tall frame, only where she was slender, he was broad and toned.

It would be fair to say I’d had a slight crush on Wesley growing up. It would be more accurate, however, to say I was madly, deeply, head over heels in love with him up until a couple of years ago.