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It took them a while to decide which rental place to use and which car to pick. Because why should they suddenly start getting along just because they agreed to do this road trip together? Bree paused at the passenger door like she always had. And then reminded herself they were no longer engaged in real life—or even dating.

She slid in, hoping he wouldn't notice her hesitation. But when she glanced up, he stood on her side anyway, looking a bit lost. Had he come over to open her door? What was going on with him? He'd been so adamant about breaking it off with her, and now he almost acted like he wanted another chance.

Would she be willing to give him one? She hadn't wanted to end their engagement and was still picking up the pieces of her broken heart. It couldn't handle much more.

"So, where to now?" He slid behind the steering wheel.

She blinked away from her worries and into the present. "Lunch?"

"Sounds good to me." He cranked the engine and eased out

of the spot. “You look something up on GPS, and I’ll get us there.”

“Burgers?”

“Sure.”

She called out directions as he squinted through the deluge the wipers could barely hold at bay. Several times they almost missed a turn because he couldn’t tell if a car was behind them or not. But thirty minutes later, they’d fought their way into Dallas proper and were parked by an orange-and-white fast-food joint.

The rain fell in sheets, but neither had an umbrella. Rain hadn’t been in her plans when she decided to take this trip. Nor had staying here.

He shot her a guilty glance. “Sorry I can’t offer a jacket or anything.”

“I think we should just run for it.” She put a hand on the door handle. “On the count of three?”

She counted fast and darted out into the downpour before he could get his door open. Puddles splashed behind her as he followed on her heels. Inside the entryway of the restaurant, Bree stood giggling and dripping on the black rug. He stepped in beside her and shook his arms off, for all the good it did.

“Remember that time we got caught in a downpour on the far side of campus and had to run back through the rain and change clothes before we could head to dinner?” The memory hit her like a blanket just out of the dryer—warm at first but cooling quickly.

“I remember.” From the tone of his voice, it affected him the same way.

That had been a good day. They’d been so far away because he’d been working up the nerve to propose. The weather had gone from partly cloudy to a thunderstorm in a matter of moments and overtook them all the way down the street on a

walk with no car nearby. They'd hoofed it back, splashing and soaked in seconds, barely making it up the hill to her dorm before collapsing in laughter.

Some people might not want a wet proposal, but she couldn't imagine anything more perfect than him brushing her hair back outside her dorm lobby, pressing a kiss to her forehead, and whispering he wanted to do life with her. He'd barely been able to wiggle the ring out of his drenched pocket, but when he did, it slid on perfectly and sparkled under the raindrops.

Why had *that* memory been the one to pop up now? Besides the obvious rain, it was lousy timing. She pushed aside the melancholia that threatened to close off her throat and pointed to the menu.

"Want to start looking at the options? I'm going to see if there are paper towels or an air dryer in the bathroom."

"I'll do the same."

She pressed the silver button on the dryer in the bathroom and contorted her body to get as much as possible under the pitiful stream of air. It would take forever for her to dry off this way. And there wasn't a paper towel in sight. They would just have to suck it up and be miserable until they could find a dry place to stay.

After ordering, they claimed a booth near the restaurant's back corner, and Bree considered sliding over next to him on the bench. The shared warmth was tempting. But not appropriate for people supposedly only friends.

"Maybe we should find a hotel while we eat?" Bree pushed her hair off her neck where it clung. "If nothing else, it would be a dry place to spend the afternoon and plan the rest of the week."

He nodded in agreement but kept his focus on the little

plastic number that would tell the worker where to bring his food.

“I found several options within easy driving distance of the downtown area. I figured I probably wouldn’t venture too far away from here.” She hovered her finger over the tiny map of Dallas on her phone.

“I’m not really sure where *here* is, but what you said makes sense.”

Their food arrived before she could reply. Of course, she wouldn’t earn his trust that quickly, but it would’ve been nice for him to say he thought she knew what she was doing or something. At least he admitted her points were valid.

He swirled his fries in a mixture of ketchup and mustard and took a bite. “Did you find a job yet?”

The change in subject threw her off for a minute, but she recovered and shook her head. “Nothing full-time, but hopefully soon. Until then, I’m teaching kids overseas early in the mornings for a cushion to help pay rent and such.”

“But you’re willing to run up a bill on your credit card this week anyway? Even not having a real way to pay it off?” He took a big bite of burger, seemingly unaware—or maybe unconcerned—that he basically just called her irresponsible and stupid in so many words.

“I told you. I’m working the online teaching gig right now.” It was enough to pay off the parts of their wedding she couldn’t get refunded. She pulled an onion off her burger. “And if I need to make a little more to pay for this, I can take on a few extra students. Why do you care, anyway? I’m not your responsibility.”

The arrow hit its mark—she could tell. His wince was more than from the pickle on his sandwich. Though it didn’t leave her with a sense of accomplishment or gain. She’d cared about him too long to want to cause him pain.

“If you’re worried about money, you can try to find something cheaper, but I checked several sites, and these were the lowest across all of them. And this one has a code where you can get ten percent more discounted.” She shoved her phone across the table and pointed to the hotel.

“I guess it’s been a while since I stayed in a hotel. I had no idea they ran so high.” He pushed it back.

“But at least you’ll get your money back from the cruise. And your flights.”

“True.” Shouldn’t be too hard. After all, he’d been able to book the trips with just a few clicks. He finished off his lunch and wadded up the paper. “I’ll work on that after we figure out where we’re going.”

“Depending on check-in time, you might want to just make those calls here instead.” She tapped the entry she’d mentioned earlier and showed they weren’t allowed to get a room until three. It was only one now.

“Nothing is ever easy, is it?” He let out a deep breath.

“You’re welcome to call in the car if you want more privacy, but this place is fairly deserted thanks to this beautiful weather. And you’d have to run through the rain again to get there.” Bree hooked a thumb over her shoulder toward the parking lot.

“Hmm. Run through the rain to get even wetter and sit in a car, or stay here already wet in the frigid air conditioning.” He mimed weighing the options in his upturned palms. “Not really a win-win situation today.”

“Sorry.” She munched an onion ring, and he was glad they weren’t kissing anymore. At least, he told himself he was. He was glad to not have to deal with onion breath, anyway.

He pulled up all the information for the flights and called the number listed. As he waited forty-five minutes for the clerk to pull up and cancel his flight information, his choice of being an accountant instead of a travel agent was confirmed. And sadly, that was probably the easier of the two to fix.

“Looks like you need a pick-me-up.” Bree pushed a cup of coffee and a fried pie his way. “It’s lemon, so I knew you’d want to try it.”

His favorite. Of course, she wouldn’t forget all the little things she’d learned about him over the last three years just because he’d called off the wedding. But it still caught him off guard that she’d go the extra steps to get it for him. Something that felt a lot like remorse tried to worm its way up through his gut, but he washed it back down with a swig of the coffee. No time for regret right now.

“If the radar is right, we might get a bit of a break in the next half hour. If we do, I say we run for it and try to get to the hotel before this mess starts again.” Bree tapped her chin as she studied the screen in front of her.

“I’m on board with that.”

“Ha. I see what you did there.” She smirked.

He blinked a few times. “What?”

“On board? Like we were going to be on board a cruise ship, but now we’re on board with just trying to beat the rain and get to a cheap hotel?” She lifted one brow and quirked her head to the side.

“O-kay.” He stretched the word out. While they’d seen eye to eye on most things, sometimes her sense of humor didn’t quite align with his.

“Anyway, do you want to wait to call about the cruise until after that? It took a while with the airlines, and I wasn’t sure about the other.”

He nodded around a mouthful of pie, which was much better than he expected.

“Okay, then.” She played with a napkin, tearing it into strips, never looking up with those blue eyes of hers.

Would their whole trip be like this? Going from moments where they were okay straight to moments of awkward silence immediately after? Before her last road trip, they’d been able to talk about anything, fill hours with conversation, never have any seconds where discomfort set in. He’d ruined that. Or she had, by taking that stupid vacation.

“Oh, look.” She pointed out the window.

A few beams of sunshine shot through the clouds, highlighting the sporadic drips still falling and making them sparkle. His chest loosened. Okay. Maybe it was a sign of better things to come. There was even a tiny rainbow struggling to form across the grey sky.

“Better go now.” He quickly gathered the bit of trash left and dumped it in the canister on the way out of the restaurant.

This time, he beat her to her side and pulled the door open for her. She cast him a glance he couldn’t interpret before sliding in. Couldn’t he still be a gentleman even if he wasn’t anything special to her?

She called the hotel on the way and confirmed an early check-in so they didn’t have to wait in the parking garage and let the rain catch back up before heading in. It wasn’t anything fancy—nothing he would’ve booked for a honeymoon trip. But he reminded himself he wasn’t on a honeymoon. This was just a road trip with a friend.

“How many nights?” The clerk asked Bree.

She glanced over her shoulder at him. “We didn’t decide that, did we?”

“It’s Saturday. So, if we stay three nights, that puts us leaving Tuesday. Four would be Wednesday. Five Thursday.”

He ticked days off on his fingers. “And you’re still wanting to drive back across Arkansas too.”

“Right. I think we can explore enough in three days, don’t you?”

“So, four nights?”

“Oh.” She tapped her forehead. “Right. Because today doesn’t count since we can’t go far, huh?”

“Right.”

“Four nights, please.”

The clerk glanced between the two of them and then nodded and typed it into the computer. “You’re all set.”

They ended up with rooms right next to each other. And when they got inside, there was a door connecting the two. Something told him that wouldn’t open over the next few days. Double bed, television set, a chair and table, simple bathroom, and a window that looked down on a parking lot. Home sweet home for now.

The walls were thin enough that he could hear Bree’s voice on the other side, though he couldn’t make out any words. Was she talking to herself or on the phone? Letting someone know she was safe?

Maybe he ought to call Josh and let him know what he thought about this little trick of convincing Bree to go on the same trip he’d convinced Nathan to take. Some brother he was. If Josh ever broke up with Haven, man, Nathan was ready to give some payback.

Just what had his brother and Skye expected to happen in this situation? Granted, this wasn’t the plan their friends had started with. No. They’d wanted them trapped on a boat together for a whole week. And in that scenario, they’d be sharing a cabin too. At least this way, he got a room to himself, bare as it was.

Bree's voice rose and fell. She must be on the phone. With Katie? Skye? Her mom?

Used to be, she'd talk to him like that. Spill out everything she'd gone through or felt. Who took his place in that area? And why did he care?

He unpacked a few things from his bag before sitting down to start the battle with the cruise line. From the very first automated voice that answered the phone, he dreaded the rest of this call.

"Speak. To. A. Rep-re-sent-a-tive!" Nathan tried to enunciate each syllable.

"I'm sorry. I didn't quite catch that. Please say your answer again." The system sounded friendly enough, but he'd love to punch it. "If you'd like to ..."

On the fourth try, he finally got, "Please hold one moment while I connect you to our customer service representatives."

"Finally." He propped his feet up on the bed and crossed his ankles.

"Your call is very important to us. We're sorry for the inconvenience, but we're experiencing high call volume right now. All our customer service representatives are busy helping other customers. If you'd like to stay on the line ..."

He let out a growl. Of course they were getting lots of calls. A hurricane had ruined the departure of their cruise. But that didn't mean he wanted to wait another forty-five minutes before even getting to talk to someone, which would probably take at least that much longer. A glance at his watch had him wondering what Bree planned for the evening. Would his being stuck on a useless phone call change things? Would she leave without him?