

Two hours after Drew was supposed to show up, Crystal's arranging a game of Risk for us to play when the phone rings. I jump but then let it ring several more times, not wanting to seem interested or desperate or even *home*.

"Hello," I say casually.

"Sophie?" Drew's voice sounds thick, as though he's been drinking. Great! A boozier.

"Hi. Is this Drew?" I try to sound as though I forgot that we even had a date.

"I'm so sorry," he slurs.

"No problem." I obsessed over *mascara*, you jerk*. Fifteen minutes in the aisle at the drugstore debating between clump-free or luxury lash.

Crystal hovers beside me, cracking her knuckles and mouthing, *Is it him?* I swat her away.

"I'm at the hospital," Drew moans. "I got hit."

"Hit? By who?" I'm thinking bar brawl. DUI, maybe.

"A truck. I was crossing the street. That's all I saw. The grill of a *very big* pickup truck." He giggles. "Sorry," he says apologetically. "They gave me a pain pill." He pauses, then perks up. "Hey, you want to come down here? I'll buy you some peanut-butter crackers from the vending machines."

The Ashland emergency room. My old stomping ground.

"I could use a lift home," Drew continues. "I'm not supposed to drive, and besides, I don't have my car."

Dating *and* the hospital. Two phobias for the price of one. "Uh... sure." I hope my hesitation doesn't make me sound stingy about giving him a ride. I'd like to ask if they'll wheel him out to the end of the parking lot so I can fetch him there. Explain that I've depleted my life-time supply of hospital bravery. But I don't want Drew calling that red-haired actress friend for a ride. She'd probably have him off and sprawled across her sofa in no time. "Sure," I repeat.

"Great," says Drew.

"Can't I come?" Crystal whines as I drive her to her friend Melvin's, where she's supposed to spend the night.

* *Not what she really said.*

"Nope, sorry."

"But you said we could sew!"

"We will, just not tonight."

"I'm really good at bowling."

"We're not going bowling. My friend's been hurt."

Crystal kicks the dashboard with her bare foot.

I glare at her. She bows her head and frowns, hugging her grungy backpack to her chest.

"Think about something fun you'd like to do this weekend," I tell her.

"I could watch your stuff while you're in the hospital, and then we could all —"

The glass hospital doors jolt open automatically, revealing the cavernous hallway into the ER.

"Move!" a man shouts as he bumps past me toward the front desk, clutching a bloody towel to the side of his head. I scramble in after him. The doors slice shut behind me.

At the front desk I tell an admitting clerk that I'm there to pick up Drew. "I'm Drew Ellis's..." *Person to contact in case of emergency?* "Ride," I tell her, not wanting to elevate my status.

She leads me down the hall to Drew, who sits behind a tan curtain on a gurney, examining a pair of crutches. His face brightens when he sees me. Even his *wrinkles* are handsome—intelligent lines across his forehead, crinkly crow's-feet when he smiles. Ethan's face always lit up when I walked into a room. I was grateful for being loved this unconditionally—loved for just showing up! But he knew all of my flaws and foibles.

"No breaks," Drew says proudly. His right arm is held close to his body in a sling, his fingers poking stiffly out of an Ace bandage. He wiggles them. "Only a few stitches."

Words and phrases:

casually
great! [ironically]
boozier
to slur
mascara
jerk [and synonyms]

clump, clump-free
hover
to crack one's
knuckles
bar brawl
DUI

to perk up
emergency room, ER
my old stomping
ground
could use
lift, a lift

and besides,
two for the price of
one
stingy
giving smb a ride
to wheel out

life-time supply
to whine
grungy
"I'm Drew Ellis's...
ride"
crow's-feet

Ethan's face always
lit up.
foibles
no breaks
stitches