

Best Friends and Honest Hearts

Rain patters on the roof of Alex's sedan. A blue hue emits from the cell phone in Alex's hands as he checks the time and weather. Alex is 22 years old and stands at about 5 feet and 11 inches tall. He has blue eyes and brown hair that comes down to around his ears. Alex is dressed up for the evening, at least by his standards. He sports a white collared shirt, black pants, and his white Converse sneakers. He sits in his car, which is spotlighted by a tall streetlamp positioned on the sidewalk just in front of the vehicle. The light, raindrops, and fogged up windows make it hard to see outside, but he can just make out the light outside one of the apartment doors. As he holds his phone, he notices a slight shaking sensation. He's been to this apartment complex many times for parties and other activities with his friends. However, tonight he is there under different circumstances. He puts on a jacket, exits his car, and is immediately hit by rain as he races to the doorstep of apartment 704, Jessica's home.

Jessica is lying in her bed, surrounded by her countless stuffed animals pillows, and her two cats, Jasper and Salem. Like Alex, Jessica is nervous and shows this by constantly tapping her foot on the end of her bed. Jessica is also 22, 5 feet and 7 inches tall. She has black hair that comes just above her shoulders, though she has also dyed the ends blue. She spent the better part of two hours trying to figure out what she would wear tonight, she finally decided on a black skirt, black long sleeve shirt, and a white jacket for the rain. The cats are startled by a knock at the front door. Jessica reaches for her phone to check the time. Her phone displays 7:02 PM. While she may be nervous, she is also excited and begins to walk downstairs towards the door. She reaches the door and opens it to find Alex standing on the doorstep, cold and wet from the rain. "Hey buddy, you ready?" he says as she lets him in. "Not yet." she replies. He removes his jacket, walks over to the couch and takes a seat. Jessica begins to walk back towards her

bedroom, "I'll be right back. I just gotta grab a few things," Alex replies with a nod and feels Jasper jump up to sit in his lap. As the cat positions itself in a comfortable position, Alex begins to rub her black and grey fur, which causes her to begin purring in delight.

Entering her room, Jessica looks around for her white wallet and her yellow backpack. She finds them smushed under her bed along with a mess of dirty clothes and various other items that have found their way under the bed. After retrieving these, she takes a final look in the mirror on her desk, fixes her hair, and then races back to the living room. "Okay, where are we heading?" She asks. "That's a secret," Alex replies with a wink. They both move through the doorway and Jessica retrieves a key from her backpack and locks her door. In the few minutes that have passed since Alex went inside, the rain has increased from a light drizzle to an absolute downpour. They look at each other, knowing what's about to happen. They both begin to run towards Alex's car, hoping to get there without getting entirely soaked. However, along the run, Alex and his shaky hands have managed to drop his key. He races back to find them on the sidewalk, scooping them up and rushing back. Jessica has reached the car but is unable to enter as the car is still locked. Alex pushes the unlock button and the turn signals on the car activate signaling the car is now unlocked. They both clamor into the vehicle and catch their breath.

In the moments after getting in, Alex started the car, turned the heater on, and struggled to not get water everywhere from his soaking wet jacket. Jessica is shivering and Alex notices. "Here, take this. You're freezing to death," he says as he reaches for a spare jacket he has in the backseat. He passes this to Jessica and they accidentally make contact and Alex notices her ice-cold hands. "No wonder you're shivering! You're literally ice cold to the touch." He exclaims. She replies "You know I don't have good circulation, dummy." Thinking back, he had known this fact. When he first met Jessica she was a little shorter and had blonde hair. They sat next to

each other in their first-period history class in their freshman year of high school. Their first interaction was not dissimilar to what just happened. Jessica has dropped her pencil and in her attempt to catch it, actually managed to knock it further away and out of her reach. Alex noticed this and he could reach it. He leaned over and grabbed it off the floor and turned to see her and talk to her for the first time. "You dropped this." He says plainly. "Thanks, I didn't notice." She says sarcastically. She reaches out and he does the same, but they collide and the first thing he notices is the absurdly cold hands she has. He almost winces at the cold sensation before finally meeting her hand with the pencil. "You should get that hand looked at." He says in response to the situation. She glances at him, shrugs, and then smiles "It's just how I am."

He turns to face the steering wheel and then checks his weather app on the phone. Again blue light fills the cabin as he searches for the application with the cloud icon, Finding it, he taps the screen and is greeted with a notice that the weather is slated to lighten up in the next hour or so. "So, where are we going?" Jessica asks again. "I told you it's a secret," he replies with a smile. "You know I hate secrets!" she replies. "I'm well aware," he says. He says. He puts the car in reverse and then backs out of the parking spot. They then proceed to exit the parking lot, taking a left towards the downtown area of the city.

As they cruise into the city, the destination becomes a bit more clear to Jessica. They're heading toward the place where they last saw each other before Alex left for college 4 years ago. This is their favorite restaurant, a small Asian restaurant called Kaizen. They'd been here prior to him leaving as a sort of going away party. Jessica was sad to see him go, but happy that he was bettering himself by going to school. She had wanted to go to the same school, but she wasn't able to save enough or earn enough money for scholarships to attend. After circling the block several times looking for a parking spot, they all seem to be taken, aside from a few that are far

away. They decide to settle for one of these distant parking spots. They exit the car and run to the awning of a nearby business.

"This isn't exactly how I planned tonight to go. This rain just came out of nowhere." Alex says. "It's alright, just makes it more memorable I suppose." She replies. Continuing, "So what made you want to turn this into a date?" she asks. Alex looks at her and thinks for a second. Thinking back, he'd always found Jessica to be interesting and fun to be around, which is why they became such good friends after they first met. Being away from her while he was in college helped him to realize that he felt like he wanted to be more than friends. He had felt this before in high school, but he kept those emotions to himself out of fear he would ruin the friendship. "I don't know, I just kinda always felt like this but I was afraid to tell you out of fear of ruining what we had then." He says. Jessica doesn't reply but she does have a slight smile on her face.

As they walk towards Kaizen, Jessica recalls how she felt when he mentioned coming back and expressing his desire to ask her out on a date, instead of going as friends. She felt happy as she too had had feelings for him and kept them to herself like Alex had. Both of them bottled these emotions up, so when Alex worked up the courage to ask her out, she was surprised but very excited to finally have an opportunity to let those emotions out.

Finally reaching Kaizen, they enter the restaurant and the host asks them, "Just you two?" Alex replies "Yes, sir. Can we have that window booth please?" "Certainly, sir." He replies. Though this seems like a normal booth in this restaurant, the same as any other inside. It held a special place for both Alex and Jessica as this was where they first sat when they found this restaurant through a mutual friend's recommendation. They both discovered their love of the restaurant and grew much closer through the many visits and conversations they had while there.

After ordering drinks and food, they begin to dive deeper into what has happened to each of them while Alex was away for all that time. Jessica can sense in his voice that he truly has missed her and she has missed him as well. Their meals come and go, but even after this, they continue to spend time discussing their lives and what they have planned for their futures. Jessica plans to go back to school at the local community college, while Alex plans to open his own business in their hometown. Alex and Jessica both have respect for each other goals and each hopes they can support the other in pursuit of their life goals. After conversing almost nonstop for two hours, they both feel that they should head out. They both slip out of their respective seats in the booth and make their way to the entrance.

As they leave, Alex takes a look at Jessica and realizes that his feelings for her are real. He reaches out for her hand and Jessica takes a glance at it before putting her hand in his. They hold hands as they stroll through the wet city streets, rain lightly falling around them. They hardly notice, focusing on each other and contemplating what will happen from that moment. They reach the car, enter, and begin the drive home, arriving a short time later.

Jessica and Alex exit the car and Alex walks her to the door. Jessica fishes the key from her handbag and fumbles to get it in the door. Finally unlocking the door, she turns to Alex and shyly says, "I had a really good time tonight, thank you for taking me out." "I did too," he says, "This wasn't weird or anything, right?" "No, I loved it! I'd like to go again sometime," she replied. "Alright, cool. Well, I'll see you soon then. Goodnight," he says. "I hope so, drive home safe, okay?" she says before entering the door and shutting it. Alex turns with a smile on his face and makes his way back to his car, believing he's found the one.