

Chapter 1

NOW

“KEY, KEY, KEY. THERE HAS TO BE ONE IN HERE,” I MUTTERED as I opened cupboards and riffled through drawers in the teachers’ lounge. I glanced over my shoulder, thinking someone was coming, but it was just voices in the hall, passing by. I’d had detention after school, so there weren’t many people left, but I was sure a random teacher or two were still on campus ready to discover me. I needed to be quick.

Half a tray of Subway wraps sat on the table behind me, making the entire room smell like onions and pickles. I opened the last drawer only to find napkins and plastic utensils. I slammed it shut, and the locked pouch in my hand containing my cellphone banged against the cupboard below.

I didn’t think teachers should be able to lock up phones. But our school had implemented this policy two years ago, and it was “going so well.” The policy was: Students were to keep their phones in their backpacks during class. If you were caught looking at it, your phone had to be locked up.

No matter how briefly you were looking at it. No matter *why* you were looking at it.

I had been caught.

It was now the end of the day. Not just any day—Friday. And my phone was still locked up. Useless in the small bag. Mr. Lopez, who had been running detention today, told me that the teacher who locked it up had to be the one to unlock it. I knew that wasn’t true.

Mr. Lopez was just being a power-hungry jerk. But I hadn't had time to fight about it if I wanted to catch Mrs. Thiessen before she went home for the weekend. I'd left the room quickly in search of her. She was the one who had caught me looking at my phone. The one who had stopped mid-lecture, put her hands on her hips, and said, "Indy, something interesting on the screen?"

My eyes had shot to hers. To my disappointment, the answer to her question was no, there was nothing interesting on my phone. Definitely not the text I'd been waiting for. "Putting it away."

She went to her desk and pulled out a lock bag. "You know the rules. And it's not your first offense this week." She tossed the bag onto my desk.

"Seriously?" I wanted to throw the lock bag across the room. I refrained. I got zero recognition for my excellent willpower.

In fact, I got the opposite when she said, "And now you have detention too."

"Cool," I said.

Ava and Caroline laughed behind me and Mrs. Thiessen shot me another look. Surprisingly, she didn't tack on some other punishment. She waited in front of my desk for me to turn off my phone, slide it into the small bag, and lock it closed. I maintained eye contact with her while completing the task. She gave me a satisfied nod and continued her lecture like she'd never stopped.

But apparently, she'd forgotten about me and my phone, because when I checked her room after detention she had already left. With the key. And so here I was in the teachers' lounge searching for a different key. I was pretty sure they were universal. Some sort of magnet mechanism.

If I couldn't free my phone, I was screwed. I'd been taking notes on it. Notes I needed. Maybe. I squeezed my eyes shut, wishing I could check my texts. Taking my phone for an entire weekend was cruel and unusual punishment.

I turned a circle in the room. "If I were an overly controlling teacher, where would I put a key?" My eyes landed on the door to

the bathroom. Maybe? What could it hurt? I'd already exhausted my search of the lounge. I might as well be thorough.

I walked inside, the heavy door swinging shut behind me. First I went to the sink and opened the cupboards below it. There was a four-pack of toilet paper, a toilet plunger, air freshener, and a basket of feminine hygiene products. I dug around inside that basket, but there was no hidden key. There were two stalls in the room. The back one was a larger handicapped stall and I went inside, but it was just a standard bathroom—toilet, paper, handrails, and seat protectors. There was a high window above the toilet, but no keys sat on its ledge. The smaller stall was the same story. The walls were mostly tile, and there were no hooks holding keys. I didn't know why I thought it would be in the bathroom, anyway.

I was going to have to cut open the bag. I'd seen some scissors in one of the drawers in the lounge. I didn't want to have to destroy the lock bag. I was sure the school would charge me for it. How much could a small pouch like this cost? Way more than I had in my bank account, considering I only had about five dollars. Would I be expelled?

Whatever. Desperate times and all that.

I went back to the door and gripped the handle, pushing it down. But it stopped short. I twisted the lock on the handle but it just spun and spun. That's when I noticed a small brick sitting on the right side of the door with a sign above it that read: *Broken lock, use to prop open door when inside.*

This was a joke, right? I looked at the brick, then back at the broken lock. "No," I said. "This isn't happening." I tugged on the handle. It didn't budge. I twisted the lock again, slowly this time, seeing if it would catch. It didn't.

I lifted the bag in my hand and tried to rip open the lock holding my cellphone hostage. It was made of some sort of rubbery material that could've very well been what they made superhero suits from, because it was stretchy yet impenetrable. I growled in frustration and tossed my phone onto the counter next to the sink.

I needed to think. I pressed my palms to my temples as if I could squeeze a viable solution out of my brain.

The window.

I fast-walked to the back stall and looked up at the window. It was too high to reach from the floor. I approached the toilet and tried not to think too hard. I slid my backpack off my shoulders and dropped it into the corner farthest from the toilet. Then I braced myself on the wall to climb onto the seat, glad I had put on tennis shoes this morning instead of flip-flops.

There were hinges at the top of the window, which told me it opened inward and probably only a couple of inches. More of a vent than a window. I twisted the gold handle at the bottom and pulled. Six inches. That's about what it gave me. Enough to wedge my face in the small opening and peer outside. I couldn't see anyone through the screen. The only thing I could see was a tree. It was unseasonably warm for late February and its branches were full of pink blossoms. They'd fall off with the next cold spell.

The sidewalks were empty. At least the small stretch of sidewalk behind the teachers' lounge bathroom.

"Hello!" I called anyway. "Anybody out there?"

I wondered if the janitors were still here. Our janitors only worked during school hours, and once again it was Friday, after hours. Any other day and they might have stayed late, but everyone wanted to flee on Fridays. *I* wanted to flee.

"Hello!" I called again, just in case.

Nothing.

I climbed down, leaving the window open so I could hear if anyone came by, then squatted by my backpack, wondering if I had something inside to help me unlock the door or free my cellphone. Everyone may have treated me like a delinquent, but I didn't actually carry around lockpicking tools or sharp objects. I unzipped the front pocket and dug through it anyway. The sharpest thing I had was a pen. In my frustration, I freed it from my backpack and used it to carve *Mrs. T sucks* onto the back of the stall door.

Okay, maybe I *was* a delinquent.

Speaking of people who thought I was a troublemaker, how long would it take my parents to wonder where I was? They would assume I'd gone to Cody's after school. They didn't know we'd broken up two weeks ago.

Actually, breaking up required two people who thought they were in a relationship in the first place. I wasn't sure he'd ever acknowledged that fact. Regardless, we were no longer talking. I didn't tell my parents, because they would've been happy about that, they hated him, and I needed to be sad for at least a couple more weeks even though he didn't deserve my sadness.

Maybe this was karma, me being stuck in the bathroom, for how I'd been acting for the past couple of months. Maybe I'd be here all weekend. Maybe the fluorescent lights and the slight aroma of mildew would be enough to transform me back into my old self. The one my mom could say she recognized. Because just three days ago, she'd told me she didn't recognize this one. *That makes two of us, Mom* was what I should've said. What I really said was *I don't recognize the new you either.*

No, I couldn't be here all weekend. I needed to be out tonight. I had to show up tomorrow, letter in hand, or my mom would never forgive me. I needed the notes from my phone.

Laughter sounded out the window and I gasped and ran back to the toilet, climbing up.

"Hello!"

"Hello!" came a voice. I couldn't see anyone.

"Over here!" I called.

"Over here!" they parroted, and then there was more laughter and echoey running through one of the outdoor breezeways. And then silence.

"Seriously?" I growled.

Behind me the glorious sound of the door opening rang out. I twisted toward it and my foot slipped. My chin hit the windowsill on

my way down and my foot landed in the toilet. I let out a loud curse but then managed to yell, "Hold the door! Hold the door!" as I yanked my now-dripping wet foot out of the toilet, pressed a hand to my aching chin, and ran out of the stall just in time to watch the door shut.

"Are you an idiot?" I said to the back of a guy who was standing at the sink. He didn't turn, just picked up my phone pouch and inspected it before setting it back down. Then he slid something that sounded like glass across the counter.

I stood there, out of breath, water squishing out of my sock and through my shoe and puddling on the floor when I shifted my weight. He turned, and as he did I saw the earbud in his ear. He hadn't heard me. Our eyes locked and my expression fell, then hardened. His did the same.

I was now stuck in the bathroom with someone I'd only seen up close once in the past two months. Someone I had never wanted to see up close again. Someone who felt the exact same way about me, I was sure.

Beau Eubanks.