

NEVER GONNA HAPPEN



Warning: *The following excerpt is unedited. Typos and grammatical errors galore.*

Double Warning: *Since this is rough-draft material, the scene I'm sharing with you may or may not end up in the final book...if the story even makes it to publication.*

Triple Warning: *Sorry, I don't really have a third warning; I'm just a goofball who wanted to write "triple warning." It's so fun! Anyway, enjoy the excerpt!*

Chapter 1

Spencer

Today was the day.

I was finally going to secure a date to the prom, and I knew just the girl I was going to ask. The prettiest, smartest, loveliest, most amazing girl in the tenth grade.

Emily Urgent was two years younger than me and had just broken up with her boyfriend of nine months the week before, meaning she was free to pursue.

Sure, every available guy at school wanted a chance with her, but I was going to be the one to win her.

It would've been all wrong if I'd tried to move in and ask her out before today. She'd been hurting and vulnerable after her nasty breakup. I had actually wanted to wait longer, give her time to heal, but I knew a whole handful of other interested buzzards were swarming, eager and frothing at the bit to dive bomb in and snag her for himself. So time was also of the essence. I guess you could say it was urgent for me to land Urgent now.

The day before, I'd subtly struck up a polite conversation, and when I'd learned her dad who usually drove her to school was laid up at home with a slipped disk in his back, I'd offered to be her chauffeur myself. She'd agreed so eagerly it'd given me the confidence to decide to pop my big question this morning.

After pulling into the drive of a brown and white Tudor-style home, I checked my face in the rearview mirror, dusted a fleck of dry toothpaste off the corner of my lip, then did a quick sniff check to my armpits. When I decided all was good in the aroma department, I popped a breath mint between my teeth for

extra measure and glanced expectantly toward the front door of the house.

What was taking her so long?

Hopefully it wasn't corny to ask a girl to prom in a car on the way to school, but I wasn't sure if I could hold my patience any longer than that. What if someone else got to her *at* school and stole my chance? I'd have to find another girl to ask, and no one else was Emily Urgent. Besides, she'd agreed to ride with *me* today. It only seemed fair I got first dibs.

Finally, what felt like a century of waiting later, the front door opened and a tall, slim girl exited, her long brown hair fluttering in the wind and whipping into her face, obstructing her view. She hefted a book bag over one shoulder and then hugged a pile of books to her chest with her other arm. I shook my head, wondering why she didn't just put all her books in the bag, and if her bag couldn't hold them, why didn't she get a bigger bag? Because knowing her, she'd trip and—yep...

There she went, stumbling over her little brother's bicycle that had been left abandoned and lying in the middle of the yard. Up flew her books, scattering all over the grass as she face-planted hard among them. I winced, sitting up a little straighter to make sure she was okay, but she sprang upright so quickly I relaxed back behind the wheel. She was fine.

Then I sighed as she paused every few seconds from collecting her fallen books to see better, wasting more and more time with each useless sweep of the hand as she tried to tuck her hair behind her ear, only for the wind to shove it right back into her face.

News flash: *it wasn't going to stay behind your ear in this weather.*

Why the heck hadn't she just pulled the stupid, brown heaping mess up into a ponytail or something on a day so windy?

Girls.

Who understood them?

I tapped the horn, letting her know I wasn't getting any younger over here and was still waiting. At this pace, school would start before she even made it to my car.

She glanced over to cast me a nasty glare before yanking up her last book and surging to her feet. A huge wet grass stain coated one knee on her khaki pants. I heaved out another sigh.

Hopeless. She was so completely hopeless.

The door to the front passenger side jerked open, and the wind nearly ripped it from her grasp. But she held on so firmly it only wrenched her a couple steps back.

I sighed, the third sigh within thirty seconds, because seriously, no one could be more pitiful than her.

Finally, straightening herself, she began to bend down to climb inside, muttering, "I'm fine. Thanks so much for your concern."

Yeah, I could tell she was fine. Didn't care.

Scowling, I hooked my thumb over my shoulder and shook my head, saying, "Nuh-uh. Back seat today."

She froze, turning wide blue eyes my way with her backside only inches from landing on the seat next to mine. Mouth opening incredulously wide, she shrieked, "Are you freaking kidding me?"

"Totally freaking serious," I answered solemnly.

A sneer followed. Then she rolled her eyes and climbed back out of the front seat before slamming the doorway too hard, thankfully not breaking the glass in the window. A second later,

the back door opened and she lumbered in, falling heavily into the back seat and grumbling under her breath the entire time.

I'm pretty sure I didn't want to know what she was saying about me, but again...didn't care. If I was forced to drive her to school and home every day, then—

Wait, what?

Oh, you thought *this* girl was Emily Urgent? The heap of a mess currently riding in the back seat of my car?

Uh...no.

That would be a big no. A gigantic no.

Not even close.

Actually, I'm kind of offended you'd even think I would ever treat the prettiest, smartest, loveliest, most amazing girl in the tenth grade, Emily "the Queen Bee" Urgent, so rudely. Really. Thanks a lot.

No, this unwanted tagalong tragedy was just Peyton.

Yeah, I should probably explain.

Peyton's mom and my mom were best friends.

You'd think that should explain everything. But, no...again, not even close.

Mom and Aunt Wanda (as I'd always called Peyton's mom) were not simply just close; I'm talking they were the same person inhabiting two different bodies. They grew up next door to each other, sat out of gym class together when one was sick, were arrested for keying some jerk's car together when they were teens, then they went to college and lived in the same dorm room. They met their respective husbands (Peyton's and my dads) on the same night and got married within a year of each other, only to find houses on the same block, and get pregnant with their first babies three months apart. Those first babies being, yeah, me and Peyton.

They even coordinated our names to go together. At first, they decided Peyton would take my last name for her first name and I'd take her last name as my first, so we'd be Royce Kinsey and Kinsey Royce. But then, our mothers realized that wouldn't work because they had already planned before we were even born that we'd get married someday. At which point it'd sound really strange for Peyton to go from Kinsey Royce to taking my surname and becoming Kinsey Kinsey. Yes, our moms thought it through *that* far. So...they used their maiden names instead for our first and middle names and flip-flopped *those*, dubbing us Spencer Peyton Kinsey and Peyton Spencer Royce.

I'm not sure how they decided which of us would be Peyton and which would be Spencer, but I kind of didn't care either, because since the moment she was born, Peyton Royce had been forced on me, and I've hated it.

You think I exaggerate? Hmph. I wish.

We shared a crib together, took our first steps together (but only because Peyton was a little overachiever who just *had* to start walking at nine months to my twelve months), took baths together, we had our first day of school picture taken together, we even got braces in middle school together.

Honestly, there wasn't a single memory from my childhood where Peyton wasn't right there beside me, experiencing it too. It was always, let Peyton play with you, give half your candy to Peyton, don't let Peyton sit alone at lunch, drive Peyton to school, be nice to Peyton.

Peyton, Peyton, Peyton.

We were treated like twins, yet always expected to fall in love one day and get married. The only problem with that was I didn't love Peyton. And I'm positive she didn't even *like* me in return.

We were complete opposites, except no, we were even further apart than that. We couldn't be compared to night and day because those were still measurements of time, connecting them. There was no connection between Peyton and me. We were more like night and...banana. We had absolutely nothing in common, except that our mothers were two of the most irritatingly pushy, intrusive people on the planet.

Don't get me wrong. I adored our moms—swear to God—but they had to let this stupid notion go, because one thing had become abundantly clear to me over the years. I would never marry Peyton Royce. I think it was my one goal in life, actually.

So, sorry, Mom and Aunt Wanda, but you two just weren't going to get your way on this.

Someday they'd be forced stop grinning like they knew something we didn't, and they'd quit spouting, *never say never*, to us because I just did.

Gauntlet dropped.

Peyton and I? It was *never* gonna happen.

Behind me, Peyton groaned. "Please don't tell me Garrett's riding with us again."

See what she did right there, calling my car—*mine*—ours, like she was actually entitled to any of it or had any say in who got to ride in it? Didn't that just on your nerves?

Well, it did mine.

It'd serve her right if I told her Garrett *was* the other passenger riding with us today. If there was anyone on earth she loathed more than she loathed me, it was my best friend. That was probably why I hung out with him as much as I did. Garrett liked to have fun and mess around and pick on her. Peyton did not. She'd always been a fun-hater like that. I think she was allergic to fun. I mean, she was allergic to everything else, so it made sense.

"Nope, sorry," I told her, kind of relishing the fact she was actually wrong about something. Ha!

"Then who gets the front seat?"

I sighed before answering—she had a habit of turning me into a sigher. "Maybe I just didn't want you sitting next to me. Ever think of that?"

With a glance into the rearview mirror, I caught the tail end of her rolling her eyes. "Not even *you're* that big of a jerk."

"Hey, I'm not a jerk at all." Offended, I pulled into the driveway of another house.

"Not to the rest of the world, maybe," she allowed, sliding up closer behind me so she could peer curiously through the front windshield at the house we parked in front of.

"Well, you don't count." She was like a sister. I think it was written somewhere that guys had to be rude to their sisters during the teen years. I was just following social convention.

Not that Peyton was paying any attention to me. Figured. She was too busy reading the big rock sign in front of the house that proclaimed the owners were the Urgents.

"Urgent?" she moaned as if supremely disappointed before sending me an incredulous glance. "*Emily* Urgent? Really?"

I shrugged, feeling my face heat. So, I was carbon copying every other guy in school and drooling after Emily Urgent? That was no reason for Peyton to pull out the judgey eyes as if I were being dull and unoriginal in my pursuits. Geez.

Defending myself, I muttered, "Her dad hurt his back and can't drive her to school, so I offered."

Peyton lifted a single eyebrow. "And I suppose you still would've offered if she were still dating Brock Heaton, right?"

I scowled, hating how she could always figure me out. "Just...try to act invisible, okay?"

With a sniff, she muttered, "Why? Are you going to ask her to prom on the way to school or something?"

Unable to answer, because this mind-reading trick she was pulling was really getting embarrassing, I sent her a short frown. "Shut up."

"Seriously?" she squawked. "While I'm stuck in the backseat creeping in on you guys? Not cool, Spence. Not cool at all."

"So...does that mean you're offering to walk the rest of the way to school?" I asked, brightening with hope.

She snorted. "While all the redbuds are blooming? Yeah, right."

Ugh, I'd forgotten. The pollen from redbud trees was one of the many things she was allergic to, and there just happened to be an entire block full of them between here and school. She probably wouldn't make it alive if she tried to walk the rest of the way. So she was just going to have to creep behind Emily and me.

"Well, what else am I supposed to do?" I hissed as the door to the Urgent house came open, and Emily swept outside into the crisp March breeze, looking posh and cheerful. "Emily's not the type to stay on the market long." She had her pale blond hair piled up—smart girl—so that the few strands the wind tossed around looked artful and classy.

The whole flawless look made my stomach knot with nerves.

Ugh, Peyton was right; this was a really stupid plan. What in the world had I been thinking? Even if I didn't have an unwanted creeper tagalong lurking around in the backseat, Emily would never agree to go to the dance with me. She was so far out of my league it wasn't even funny.

With a moaning kind of sigh, Peyton flopped back into her seat and said, "Just...fine. I'll hop out as soon as you stop the car at school. Maybe you'll have a second alone to ask her then. Just don't do it while I'm in here; that would be lame."

I nodded as I watched Emily approach. "Okay." For once, Peyton made a good point. "Any other advice?"

"Yeah. Try not to be so...you."

"Hey." I shot her a dirty glance just as the passenger side door came open.

"Hi! Sorry if I took so long. I couldn't find my — oh!" Emily slid all the way in and shut her door before she noticed Peyton. She blinked three times before sending me a questioning glance and then turning back toward the backseat and hesitantly saying, "Hi."

Her confusion was palatable. That told me she hadn't been expecting any other riders, meaning she'd thought we'd be alone together, in which case maybe she'd also been expecting me to ask her to prom on the way to school, which meant...oh wow, she'd probably been planning to tell me yes!

My heart leapt into my throat. Emily Urgent was going to tell me yes.

Then I remembered she was still weirded out by Peyton's presence.

"Oh, sorry. You know Peyton, right?"

"Um...yeah. Sure. Hey, Peyton."

Peyton sent her a silent, tight-lipped wave. She typically closed down around other people. I was used to it. Emily probably thought it was rude.

I cleared my throat and reversed from the driveway. "You don't mind if she rides with us, right?"

"Uh..." That big pause right there meant yes, she totally minded. But being the prettiest, smartest, loveliest, most

amazing girl in the tenth grade, Emily had to act chill about it. She cleared her throat before saying, “No. Not at all. The more the merrier. You two are...cousins, right?”

Pretty much everyone confused Peyton and me as related. It would’ve been easier if we’d just owned it, but nope, we typically explained the truth. “Nah, we’re just neighbors,” I answered, giving the short version before adding, “My mom makes me give her a ride every day.”

I could practically feel Peyton bristling from the backseat, and that made me smile a little as I focused on the road ahead. It only seemed right that I annoyed her as much as she annoyed me.

From next to me, Emily murmured, “Oh.” Then she more quietly added, “I’m sorry.”

I blinked. Uh...was that a dig at Peyton, telling me she was sorry because I was forced to give such a loser a ride each day? Not cool.

I mean, sure, I was totally allowed to annoy Peyton myself and say all kinds of rude, obnoxious stuff her way. I allowed Garrett some ribbing rights too—until he made her cry, and then I usually had to shut that down. But it felt all kinds of wrong to let someone else belittle her. I’d thought Emily was nicer and lovelier than that.

Casting a concerned glance into the backseat, I caught sight of Peyton’s eyes watering.

Great. Emily had hurt her feelings. Now I was going to have to defend her. I hated defending Peyton.

But then Peyton followed up the wet eyes with a sneeze before she began to scratch her arms.

Okay, that wasn’t her typical hurt behavior. Peyton usually only did that kind of stuff when—

Just as she sneezed again, I caught the faint whiff of feline in the air.

Eyes widening as panic hit, I swallowed before glancing Emily's way. "Hey, uh, do you...do you happen to own a cat, by chance?"

Emily blinked at me as if that was the strangest, most random question anyone had ever asked her. A second later, she flushed bright red. "Oh, no. Do I have fur all over me? Skittles sheds like a maniac." She began to brush her lap madly with her hands, sending dust particles and white cat hairs spiraling up into the interior of the car.

"No!" I shouted, not really meaning to shout, and yet shouting anyway.

But it was too late. The damage was done.

In the backseat, coughs turned into wheezes.

"Spencer," Peyton gasped, clutching her throat.

My fingers clenched around the steering wheel as frustration and more panic mounted. This was going to end badly. This was going to end *so* epically bad.

"It's only, like, five more blocks until school," I reasoned with her as she began to scratch more vigorously at the hives sprouting on her arms through all her coughing, wheezing, sneezes. "Can't you just...hold it, or something?"

"Right. I'll just hold in my...." More coughing commenced before she choked on her own words, as if her throat were swelling closed.

Yeah, we weren't going to make it to school like this.

"What's going on?" Emily asked, glancing back at Peyton, only to yelp and smack her hand to her chest. "Ohmigosh, is she okay?"

Grumbling under my breath, because the answer to that question could be so very debatable, I jerked the car to the curb

and slammed it into *park*. “She’s having an allergic reaction,” I explained, turning to Emily to give her an apologetic wince. “To the cat dander on you.”

“Really?” Her eyes widened even larger. “Ohmigosh, I had no idea. I’m so sorry.” Again, she began to sweep the feline remains off her with her hands, littering the air with more cat.

“No!” I hollered again, lifting both hands. “Stop. You’re only getting more in the air and making it worse.”

Emily froze, her hands poised above her lap. “What do we do?” she whispered before shifting her eyes, and her eyes only, Peyton’s way, where Peyton wasn’t faring so well.

“You two can’t stay in the car together,” I answered. “Someone’s going to have to walk.” I reached past Emily’s knee, which made her jump and swing her leg away from me, so I could get to the glove compartment. “Excuse me.” I flipped open the door and started dragging out an EpiPen, inhaler, and nasal spray.

It would’ve been nice if I could’ve fit cool stuff in my own glove compartment that actually belonged to me, but no...over time, it had become a mini pharmacy dedicated to Peyton and her allergies.

When I shut the glove compartment door, Emily was still sitting there, gaping at me. Maybe I should’ve told her she could unfreeze now. I’m not sure. But I sent her a telling look, lifting my eyebrows meaningfully, so she’d get the hint.

She blinked, once, then twice, before finally yelping, “What? You don’t expect *me* to be the one to walk the rest of the way to school?”

We still hadn’t passed Redbud row yet; there was no way Peyton would make it through there on foot, especially not in the condition she was in. But I didn’t explain any of this to Emily. One: I didn’t want her to start thinking of Peyton as some kind

of freak, and two: Hello! Peyton could barely breathe because of her. And now she expected Peyton to walk? Where the heck was all her lovely, selfless, amazingness now?

It was my turn to blink at her as if I couldn't be certain if she was for real or not, because...*really*. "You're not the one having an asthma attack right now," I said logically, or at least, it sounded logical to me. I didn't even flood my tone with any of the impatience or exasperation I was feeling.

But Emily huffed as if I'd forced her to walk five miles instead of five blocks. "Unbelievable," she muttered, flinging open the door before gathering her things and climbing out. "You're a real piece of work, Spencer Kinsey. You know that? A real *jerk*." The passenger side door gave a hearty crack as she slammed it shut.

I sighed, defeated, and yet not able to take a moment to mourn the loss.

Turning promptly toward the backseat, I held up the drugstore in my hands. "Which one?"

Peyton blinked, trying to focus on the items through red, watering eyes before she grabbed the inhaler and nasal spray.

As she sucked in a lungful of albuterol, I rolled down the windows to air the place out. The coughing stopped almost immediately.

Giving her a moment to get herself back under control, I stared sullenly out the front window as Emily stormed down the sidewalk away from us. I guess I could've just left the car with Peyton and walked with Emily the rest of the way to school. But it didn't seem safe to leave my "patient" alone just yet in case she happened to have another flare up.

Behind me, the sound of Peyton snuffling her nasal spray made me sigh. Not even glancing back, I tossed a box full of tissues into the backseat for her.

“Thank you,” she mumbled miserably.

I’d made the right choice, I assured myself. I had.

Yet, I still felt crappy.

“I’m sorry,” Peyton added before blowing her nose. One of those big, wet, gross-sounding blows.

I glanced back. She was already getting better, the hives dissipating and her eyes losing some of their redness. The poor thing looked so hopeless and pathetic it reassured me even more I’d done the right thing.

With a shrug, I turned away and put the car into gear. “Don’t worry about it,” I said. “I didn’t want to go to prom with her that bad, anyway.”

I’m pretty sure Peyton knew I was lying—she always did—but she didn’t correct me. It only would’ve made things worse, almost as bad things got when we drove past Emily seconds later, and she flipped us off.