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Why Save Alexander
A Novel

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Library of Congress Control Number:2019913444

ISBN 978-1-400328277 (Paperback)
ISBN 978-1-400328284 (Hardbound)
ISBN 978-1-400328291 (eBook)

Chapter 1
June 21

"Alex, what are you doing? You are completely ignoring this conversation! What's the distraction?" said Paige. She and two other teens looked in the direction of Alex's diverted glances. The four of them sat in the Los Angeles airport terminal waiting to board their flight.

Attempting to look indifferent, he leaned in closer and whispered, "That girl over there keeps staring at me, I think she must recognize me from the show."

They all zeroed in on the girl in question, a young woman with her face in a book. "She's not staring at you! She's reading a book," said Paige.

"Well, she's not staring now!" said Alex. "She's probably a fan, debating whether or not to come ask me for my autograph."

The others couldn't keep straight faces, and Paige went on the offensive again, "She's not staring at you, she's reading a book. You spend way too much of your life in a fantasy world!"

"She did look my way, I saw it."

"You're sitting under the TV," said Austin. "Everyone is going to look your way eventually. Besides, she doesn't look like the type of person who watches our show or would be interested in a seventeen-year-old high school boy no matter how cute and important he thinks he is. I'm sorry to say it, but I think that girl is at least twenty-five and she's reading a book. I

can almost bet she's not watching a reality show about teen gamers trying to go pro."

"You wait and see," said Alex. "When the camera team arrives to film our departure, she'll rush up and ask for my autograph." Alex possessed many faults but a lack of persistence was not one of them.

"You don't even own a pen!" said Paige.

Alex sat paralyzed for a second as he considered the truth of the statement, and then patted his jacket pockets for a nonexistent pen. He quickly broke past the awkward moment, "You're so lame, fans always have their own pens!"

"How would you know? I don't think I've ever seen anyone ask for your autograph," said Paige.

As if it was scripted and on cue, a girl about nine years old pulled away from her mother and ran up to her. "Is your name Paige? From the TV show?"

"Yes, it is! Are you one of our faithful fans?"

"I love your show! Can I get your autograph?" The little girl held out a thin notebook with kittens on the cover and a pen tucked into the spiral binding. Paige signed the notebook and drew a funny face, causing the girl to giggle with delight.

Her mother seemed a bit impatient with the delay but Paige couldn't resist asking her, "Don't you want Alex's autograph?"

The little girl looked sheepishly at Alex with his moppy blond hair, blue eyes, and boyish face with an expression of suspense.

"No, thank you. I've got to go," and she was off.

"You were right, Alex! Fans do have their own pens," said Paige with a smirk.

Alex quickly changed the subject, "Hey, where's the camera crew? They were supposed to be here by now."

Paige rolled her eyes, "I guess the young fawning woman over there has proven to be more distracting than your phone, didn't you see the text?"

Alex felt a twinge of panic as he reached for his phone, "What text…?" and opened his messaging app. Letting out a long groan, he began to rant,

"What? How could they? Stuck on the 101? They know this is LA! They should have known to leave earlier! I can't believe this!"

Her smug look made it clear that she already knew about the delay and Paige took the opportunity to tease Alex again, "And you're not getting your autograph!"

They all watched with amusement as Alex started to make a call.

"Who are you calling? It's not going to make a difference," said Paige.

"He's calling Mommy," Austin jabbed.

At that remark, Alex's eyes filled with fire, and if his imaginations could become reality, the others would have witnessed two lasers annihilating Austin on the spot. Austin stopped smirking when he received an elbow from Chase, indicating that he had crossed the line.

The penetrating stare and the subsequent jolt in the ribs warned Austin to not say another word, not because it offended Alex, but because Alex's mom was a key part of their aspiring lives. Allison was the producer of their fledgling reality show.

Alex finally got through, "Mom, they're late and they don't think they'll get here before the plane leaves!" His words were void of civility much less affection or respect. "Why didn't you schedule them to leave with enough time? It's not like traffic delays are a new phenomenon around here…. You should have scheduled them earlier…. That's not the point, Mom, of course no one was expecting an accident to block two lanes! They don't schedule accidents but you might have scheduled the crew to come earlier. What are we supposed to do? This is our big trip…. What? You're joking! Take the video on my phone? Mom, that's lame! People here will think we're just a bunch of kids fooling around, it won't stir up interest."

In the back of his mind was the passing thought of the girl who wouldn't be inspired to ask for his autograph. "We'll look like a bunch of nobodies!" His voice kept getting louder and more volatile, "Thanks for nothing! At least Dad came through!" After that crescendo he slammed his phone down on the small table next to his seat and everyone in earshot could hear the distinct sound of cracking glass. Alex immediately flopped from his fit of anger to mortification.

His tantrum hardly went unnoticed by those within radius of his rising voice. He unwittingly gained an audience, but not an admiring one. The general disgust that had risen during that short exchange was granted some comic relief at the realization that the shameful boy, who dared to speak to his mother in such a disrespectful way, had just wrecked his own phone. If this were a scene for a sitcom, the writers might have scripted the onlookers to give way to their impulse and burst out in applause at the demise of his phone. Since they were not actors following a script, they only exchanged glances with one another with gloating satisfaction that silently reverberated, *Serves him right!*

Speechless and in disbelief, Alex handled his phone as if it were a childhood pet dying in his arms.

"Man, he really slammed that down hard," said Chase, whispering privately to Austin.

In shock, Alex just stared blankly at his dead phone, holding to a false hope of a miraculous resuscitation. He snapped out of it and realized he had a very short time to try securing a replacement phone before their plane departed for Seoul.