

“Why won’t this stupid thing open?” Audrie groaned and set the peach jar down on her chipped counter, giving up her attempts to pry the lid free.

A song blasted from my phone, from the rock playlist me and my dad had made together a few years back when he first went into retirement. It was just as old as this apartment--peeled wallpaper, splintered floorboards. All the oldness reminded me of home.

I looked over, grinning at her frustration. “Come on, it can’t be that hard. Give it here.”

“Be my guest,” she said, resting her elbows on the island table. She slid it over, and I caught it. “You’re sure Dad said *peach* cobbler? Apple wouldn’t do? That way I don’t have to wrestle a jar of preserves.”

“He loves the stuff,” I said, struggling with the lid a moment before popping it open. I handed it back to a dumbfounded Audrie, who shook her head. “We can’t have his party without cobbler.”

“Can you turn down that music then? I can’t hear myself think. I’ll get the measurements wrong.”

“No way. It’s Dad’s birthday—I’m playing this *all* night.”

“*All* night? It sounds like someone smashed their face against a guitar and called it a song.”

I smiled at her commentary, scrolling down until I came to one of Dad’s favorites—Rocket 88. I remembered cruising down the highway when I was younger, Audrie laughing in the back seat as Dad sang at the top of his lungs.

“*Let me introduce you to my Rocket ‘88,*” the phone hummed, the audio still crackling after having dropped it a thousand times. It was just the way I liked it, like the old car radio.

“Not this one again,” Audrie whined as she slid the cobbler into the oven. “Turn it *down*, at least. The neighbors can probably hear you.”

I rolled my eyes, turning it up even louder in spite of her. The phone vibrated, a notification popping up on the top of the cracked screen. It was from Evergreen Retirement Home. Weird. It was probably another mixup with Dad’s medication.

“Turn it down! You-”

“*Step in my Rocket and—don’t be late,*”

The phone slipped from my fingers and onto the counter with a muffled clatter as I read the text. My eyes stung with sudden tears, like I’d just been slapped. “Oh gosh-”

“*Goin’ on the corner and havin’ some fun,*”

Audrie glanced over, hesitating. “What’s wrong?”

“*Takin’ my Rocket on a long, hot run.*”

I took in a shaky breath, trying to calm myself enough to speak. “It’s Dad. He’s having a stroke.”

Her eyes widened, her voice choked. “He’s—what?”

“Audrie—”

“Get the keys.”

I stood, frozen, my shocked mind still scrambling for an answer.

“*You know it’s great, don’t be late.*”

“Keys, Mackie!”

I grabbed them just as Audrie rushed past me, her apron still on and her shoes half tied. I followed, running out the door toward her car, fear swelling as I ran.

“*Movin’ all along.*”