

## *Four Letters*

I dropped my backpack onto the desk.

My books made a loud thud against the hard wood top and the room was quiet. There was a boy sitting beside me wearing a pair of red Beats headphones and filing through a deck of index cards. He must have felt the vibration against his elbows as he used them to prop himself up on the desk. His pencil rolled off the edge of the desk and fell to the floor just before he could reach it.

My hand shot to my mouth apologetically.

He looked at me and smiled as if to say, “Don’t worry about it.” He adjusted his headphones before bending over in his seat to find where his pencil had gone.

I knew he couldn’t hear me, so I threw my hands up to let him know I would get it for him.

I bent down and grabbed the pencil and he retreated back into his seat. I placed his pencil back on the desk, but something caught my eye from under the table. Dangling, unconnected, from the bottom of his shirt was the jack-end to his headphones. I stood up slowly and he smiled a thank you, and then started bobbing his head.

He had one of those cute crooked smiles like Jesse Bradford. I sat down and unpacked my books from my backpack. The bell rang to signal that second period had officially started. There was a bearded man slouching in his seat at the head of the class room. He was wearing checkered suspenders and a pair of sunglasses. I couldn’t tell if he was staring at me or not and I couldn’t help but glance over to check at least once every few seconds. The words “Study Hall” were written behind him on the black board.

I looked at the clock and watched the second hand tick, tick passed the twelve.

*Only forty-nine more minutes.*

I realized my foot had been tapping restlessly against the tile floor. I looked at my books just sitting there along the desk and attempted to open my Algebra II textbook, but when I felt how thick the cover was I started to tap my fingers against it. It was the first week of school; I had nothing to study *for*. I glanced over at the cute guy sitting beside me. He wore a brown leather jacket, almost identical to his dark brown hair. I watched him bob his head to imaginary music as he filled out an index card and added it to the pile.

I tried to think of a subtle way to get his attention, so I grabbed one of my notebooks and started scribbling the names of all fifty states, purposely bumping my right elbow into his left. The first time I did it, he just looked at me and smirked. I smirked back. The second time I did it, he moved his elbow without even turning his head. By the third time, he dropped his arm from the table altogether, but I think he smiled the last time.

*Real subtle, Julie!*

I glanced down to find the stray jack dangling from his shirt, but he started to shift in his seat and placed his left hand on his lap.

*Okay Julie, stop being a creep.*

Forty-nine minutes passed and any attempts I made to initiate conversation with this boy were futile. The bell rang to dismiss us and the bearded man in checkered suspenders jumped up in his seat. “Class dismissed.”

And the boy with the crooked smile was gone.

The next day, I gently placed my backpack on the desk.

The cute boy was already in his seat, head bobbing and index cards shuffling. I dug into my backpack and pulled out a stack of 150 colored index cards. I slipped a light green one from out of the pile and grabbed a pen.

Hi ☺

I slipped the card under his arm so that he had to pick it up in order to see what I was doing. He grabbed the card and read it, crooked smile slipping onto his lips. He grabbed one of his own plain white index cards and started to write. A second later he placed the card in front of me.

Hey

I smiled so hard, I thought my cheeks were in my eyes. I glanced over at him and all I noticed were his green eyes smiling back at me sheepishly. We both looked away and suddenly I was worried other people were watching us. I felt my face heat up with embarrassment even though no one seemed to notice us. I grabbed another index card, this time purple.

My name's Julie. What's yours?

I slipped the card back under his arm and he read it immediately.

Nice to meet you Julie. My name's Carter.

What song are you listening to?

It's a special song. You wouldn't know it.

Can I hear it?

Maybe some day.

Stumped by his last card, I didn't know what to say next. When he noticed I wasn't writing anything down, he grabbed another one of his cards and started to write.

So what classes are you taking?

For the remainder of Study Hall, Carter and I exchanged index cards and we talked about everything from classes, to favorite books, to exotic places we wanted to travel to. By the end my pack of 150 colored index cards had dropped to a measly six cards. I looked up at the clock and noticed we only had a minute left before the bell rang. I grabbed another index card and started to write, but the ink in my pen died. I shook it a few times and even tried to wet the point with my tongue, but nothing worked. Carter tapped my arm with his pen and offered it to me. I quickly scribbled onto the card.

Would it be too straightforward of me  
to ask for your cellphone number?

I gave Carter the index card, but after he read it there was a frown on his face.

*No! Where's your sexy crooked smile? Why are you frowning?*

He took another one of his white index cards and started writing.

I'm sorry, but I don't have one.

Then the bell rang and Carter quickly stuffed his books into his bag and fled out into the hall with the other students.

The next day, I got to Study Hall at my usual time, but Carter wasn't there.

Only about five minutes had gone by, but when you're as impatient as I am it felt like more. I couldn't help but glance at the entrance every few seconds, hoping to see him walking through. After another ten minutes rolled by, I gave up and put my index cards away.

There was a gentle tap on my shoulder and I turned to find Carter smiling back at me. He was wearing his leather jacket again and his headphones were still glued to his ears. He placed one of his white index cards on the desk in front of me.

Hey there beautiful

I blushed at the compliment, but shook it off and gave him an affectionate glare.

Why are you late?

Carter sat down promptly and searched for more cards in his backpack.

Sorry, I didn't hear the bell ring.

I shrugged my shoulders to say, "It's okay." Watching him adjust his headphones only made my curiosity stronger.

Could I hear your special song today?

This made him frown again. He looked at the card and then at me several times before shrugging his shoulders and nodding his head. Carter pulled his headphones from around his ears and placed them on mine. I knew the jack was unconnected, but for some reason I was still expecting to hear something.

Once the headphones were on tight, I sat there for a minute and pretended to jam out to a great song. Carter looked at me with a puzzled expression on his face. I stopped bobbing my head and laughed silently. Then I pulled the cord from his shirt to reveal the unconnected jack. Slowly removing the headphones from around my ears, I noticed Carter's right hand moving closer to his chest. He started with a closed fist and one finger pointing at himself followed by spelling four letters in sign language: D.E.A.F.

For a moment we just stared at each other. There was an embarrassed expression on Carter's face and he looked away. Then I tapped him on the shoulder to get his attention and placed my left hand on my chest just as he did.

Then I spelled four letters: M.U.T.E.

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