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**The Permanent Record Caper**

**9<sup>th</sup> grade**

**1826 words**

**Principal Monroe's Law: All doors in Riverton High School are to remain locked on the outside at all times.**

I hate to be cliché, but this is *the moment*.

You know, the moment when everything seems to fall into place, everything's perfect, just the way it should be. The moment when you're standing in the middle of a deserted hallway in the middle of the school day about to execute a plan you took two months to plan.

No? Okay.

Anyways, this is a *moment*, and I've been waiting for it ever since Levi Ashford punched a locker and I was nearby to catch the full force of the punishment. Of course, given my perfect track record, I wasn't really punished, thus allowing me to continue my reign as the only boy in senior year who hasn't gotten a detention.

Yet. There are no givens in this plan.

After one last glance around the hallways, I walk up to the principal's office, taking a deep breath. Everyone is at an assembly, some school motivation winter break thing that even the administration must attend. Perfect.

My hand makes its way to my pocket again, checking for the umpteenth time for the key. I politely asked the janitor for it, but when he declined not-very-politely, I stole it. News flash world, Jay Cooper can be bad! Shocker.

After another adrenaline-filled second of checking my surroundings, I push the key into the lock stealthily and turn it. Thankfully, it works, and the door clicks open.

Phase One is complete.

**Murphy's Law: Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong.**

It doesn't take long to locate the cabinets filled with every student's permanent record. They're big and gray and metal, just like the movies make them look; they're sheltered behind a big meeting desk. I thank Principal Monroe, who's busy delivering her annual speech in the auditorium, for placing her furniture in a way that I could hide under at any point in time.

"Abdullah, Beckett, Brooklyn, Calloway," I list out softly, trying to find 'Cooper'. It's risky, speaking out loud, but to the best of my knowledge, I should be completely alone, so I'm fine.

On second thought, I shouldn't have jinxed it.

There's someone coming. This person isn't as stealthy as I am, so I hear footsteps on the carpet outside. Immediately, I duck under the table, crouching between two polished chairs. Hopefully, it's just a student who came to get something from the office outside, but the footsteps grow closer and closer.

Through the legs of the chairs in front of me, I can see two purple sneakers enter the room. My breath catches as I realize that while the person may be a student, he or she could have no problem turning me in if they saw-

I left the file cabinet open.

Our principal is given an inflated sense of self-worth at our school, propelled by the spacey office they get. The student hasn't moved yet, so I guess they're looking at the other side of the room. Slowly, I reach my hand up to push the drawer back in.

I underestimate my own strength, however, and the drawer closes with a bang at my slightest push. The office definitely isn't big enough to hide this sound.

My heart is thumping so loudly I'd almost consider it another revealing factor. I know the person is definitely looking my way now, but I need to move so I don't get associated with it. As soon as I slide a little to the left, however, I bump into a chair. Now, if the chairs were solid, I'd barely make a sound, but this chair topples over, hitting the next chair, which hits the table's metal-plated edges with another bang.

So much for stealth.

I jump up as quickly as I can, running through all of my possible excuses. Maybe I'd just pin in on the other boy in the office.

The one problem is that the other boy in the office is Spencer Reyes.

"Spencer!" I exclaim, trying to sound like a friend instead of a deer in the headlights. "How's it going? Funny running into you here, man. You know, I was here because the principal said so, you know? I just had to get her-"

"Jay?" Spencer asks in disbelief. Now, Spencer Reyes is not someone I'd call "bad," but he's not someone with a squeaky-clean record, which is probably why he's here.

"Principal business stuff," I say again, but my voice is too high and shaky.

"Sure," Spencer says, his voice dripping with sarcasm. "So am I. Why *are* you here, Jay?"

**Jay Cooper's Law: Think through all your decisions, especially when they concern people with questionable character.**

"I'm looking for my permanent record," I tell Spencer truthfully.

He doesn't take it that way. After a millisecond of staring at me, he bursts out laughing, like really *laughing*, bent over, clutching his stomach.

"What?" I ask, now more self-conscious than anything. "Can't a guy just sneak into an office to see his permanent record without getting laughed at?"

"It's... not... you," Spencer gasps out, wiping at imaginary tears in his eyes. He's stopped laughing, but a grin still lights up his whole face. "I mean, it kind of is. Why in the world would you need to look at your permanent record?"

All I have to do is deadpan, "Levi Ashford."

Now, unlike Spencer, Levi Ashford is a total troublemaker. I'm not sure if it was one too many suspensions, the fact that he was high during practice, or violence, but Levi got cut from the football team. He doesn't have a great sense of anger management, so when he got the news (from poor Katherine McCullough, bless her courage) he had to punch the nearest thing to his fist, which happened to be the locker next to mine.

"Oh," is all Spencer replies, understanding immediately. "Rumor has it someone got warned when they took the fall, because they were innocent. Guess it was you."

"I'm making sure it's not on my permanent record," I explain, turning around to the cabinets again. I figure that if Spencer has time to stay and chat, he won't turn me in. "What about you? Why and how are you in here?"

He laughs again. "That was the second thing, actually. I'm, uh, also here for my permanent record. I asked to go to the bathroom five minutes ago, and I kind of made a split second decision to come here. I can't believe the door was unlocked."

Spencer walks around the table, fully comfortable now, and starts rifling through his own drawer to find his file. Meanwhile, I gape at him.

"What do you mean, five minutes ago?" I also hate to be petty, but the world would be pretty unfair if Spencer Reyes has the natural God-given ability to just skip an assembly and do what he wants. "It took me *two months* to think of this plan! I unlocked the door! *I* stole the key from the janitor!"

He doesn't even break away from his search. "Amateur. I can't believe it actually took you two months. Thanks for the key, though."

I huff and pick out my file, placing it on the polished tables. It's a simple manila folder, stuffed to the brink with my school life. Spencer follows suit soon after, laying out his file next to mine. His file is about the same size as mine, stuffed with four years of whatever he did.

Personally, this is my first time breaking and entering, and my first time looking at my record, so I'm not sure where my offenses record will be. I just decide to look through everything that I have. It might be good to look at what I've been up to anyways.

I look through my record from front to back to front again two whole times. All my volunteer slips are there, my report cards, my awards from orchestra and French club. I whoop in relief softly when I realize there are absolutely no detention slips or black stains in the folder. I really was let off the hook then.

Spencer seems to be done too. He grabs a square piece of yellow paper, crumples it up and stuffs it in his pocket. "They copy all the detention slips," he tells me, packing his folder up and finding its place in the drawer. "One more, and I'll be suspended from the next basketball game, so I took one. Better safe than sorry, right?"

That's when it dawns on me that Spencer didn't come to just look at his record. "I didn't hear that," I tell him, locking up the cabinets and gathering my things. "I will not be an unwitting accomplice."

He just shrugs. "Whatever. I'm headed out the back entrance of the office, but if you came from the front, I'll meet you in front of the auditorium."

"Sure. By the way, you won't tell, right?" Like he said, better safe than sorry.

"What happens in this room stays in this room," he says, already walking away.

**Spencer Reyes' Law: If something in life is undone, it will, without a doubt, be replaced.**

As planned, I can see Spencer walking towards me from the other side of the hallway. He shoots me a conspiratorial smile, and then everything becomes slow motion.

It's like in a movie, when a character turns his back to say goodbye to someone, and as soon as he does, promptly gets shot in the back. Spencer smiles at me, and the corners of my

mouth turn up to smile in response, when the auditorium door opens. Vice Principal Sharma steps out, right between us.

“Well, well,” he says as one eyebrow rises. “Jay Cooper and Spencer Reyes. Mind explaining what you two are doing here in the middle of a mandatory school assembly?”

“Jay?” Spencer exclaims suddenly, putting on a façade. We’re side by side in front of Vice Principal Sharma now, so he’s close enough to clap my shoulder. “Funny running into you here! What are you doing out?”

His tone screams buddy-chum-pal at me, but I don’t trust my acting to mirror it. Still, I give it a try. “Just went to the bathroom. What are you doing out?”

I sound like one of those children’s show characters that ask the stupidest, most obvious questions. I remind myself to thank Spencer for playing along later.

“I went to the bathroom too,” he says, sounding completely natural. “Must’ve gone to the one on the other side of this floor.”

For a second, Vice Principal Sharma stares at us, and, for a split second, I believe he’ll fall for it.

No such luck.

Procuring a small pink pad and a pen from his khakis, he gives us a knowing glare from under his glasses. “Detention, both of you.”

And there goes my record.