

PRT 389- "Connections"

I was sitting at the table looking over the treatment the director had given me for my new video. I liked it and I was trying to envision it. It was a simple concept. Me driving through the desert singing to a guy...that was basically it...but it needed flair. I wanted a country feel to it, but I also wanted a free feel to it...almost hippyish. The car...it had to be the right car.

Suddenly it hit me...a VW van! That would be awesome! I knew someone that had one...who was it? Tori, of course! Tori Hanson had one. I just needed to call Michelle and get her number.

I picked up the phone and dialed Michelle's home number.

"Hello?" an Australian male voice said.

"Hi Jesse, it's Raye, is Michelle around?" I asked.

"Give me that." I heard Michelle say in the background. I don't think she was thrilled with Jesse answering her phone. Made sense considering they were having an affair.

"Hey Raye, Mich can't come to the phone right now." Jesse laughed.

"Jesse!" I heard Michelle cry. It sounded like she was trying to grab the phone from him.

I laughed.

Michelle evidently won the phone war cause the next voice I heard was her's, "Hey Raye, sorry about that."

I laughed again, "It's fine. I just had a quick question."

"Ok."

"What's Tori Hanson's phone number?"

"Let me grab my cell and look it up. Why?"

"I want to borrow her van for my video shoot."

"Ah, ok. Here it is. I'll text it to you."

"Ok, sounds great. Thanks."

"No problem. Let me know how the shoot goes...oh, and Holly will be emailing you your promotional schedule in a couple of days."

"Awesome, thanks. Bye."

"Bye."

I hung up and called Tori. She was happy to lend me her van.

"Chad, I'm heading out." I called as I grabbed my purse.

"Where are you going?" he asked as he walked over to me.

"Blue Bay Harbor. I'm going to borrow Tori's van for my video shoot."

"Can I tag along?"

"Um, sure, if you want to."

"Yeah, I do."

"OK. Let's go."

We got in the car and headed to Blue Bay Harbor.

"Don't you have a video shoot coming up too?" I asked.

"Yeah, in a couple of days."

"Cool."

"Yeah. The last single didn't do great and I think it may be because I didn't shoot a video."

I nodded, "Videos really help. Why didn't you shoot one anyway?"

"I don't know. It didn't seem necessary I guess."

"Clearly you aren't a PR person."

"Clearly."

We arrived at Storm Chargers, where we'd agreed to meet Tori. We pulled in to a parking place and Chad noticed a yellow Mustang.

"Oh my god, that is the sweetest car I've ever seen." He said as he all but sprinted out of our car over to the Mustang.

I rolled my eyes, “Come on Chad, stop drooling.” We went into the store and found Tori waiting on us. “Hey Tori.” I said.

“Hey guys.” Tori said.

“How’s it going?”

“It’s insane. Wedding is next month and I still have so much to do.”

“I can imagine. Did you invite Michelle to the wedding?”

“Yeah, actually she’s one of my bride’s maids.”

I looked at her, “Um...isn’t Hunter the best man?”

“Of course.”

“Are you sure it’s a good idea to have Michelle in the wedding then?”

“She said she was ok with it. So did Hunter.”

“I hope so. I would hate to see the king and queen of drama cause a scene at your wedding.”

Tori laughed, “Thanks for your concern.”

“Hey, whose yellow Mustang is that?” Chad asked as he looked toward the parking lot.

“That’s Eric’s.”

“What’s Eric’s?” Eric asked as he came up from the back.

“The yellow Mustang.” Tori replied.

Eric nodded, “Yeah, that’s mine.”

“It’s a sweet car dude.” Chad said.

“Thanks.”

“Hey, I need a car for my video. Any chance you’d let me borrow it?”

“My...Mustang? Um...” Eric hesitated.

“I’ll pay you.”

“Eric, you were saying you needed extra money with the twins and all.” Tori said.

“Twins?” I asked.

“Yeah, Tally and Eric have twins. They are like 2 months old.”

“Oh wow, congratulations! I had no idea.”

“Thanks. I haven’t talked to Mich in awhile and I don’t think Conner has either so she probably doesn’t even know.” Eric said.

“So, about the Mustang...” Chad said.

Eric sighed, “Fine, you can borrow it...but I better get it back in the same condition you take it in.”

“You have my word.”

I laughed, “Boys and their toys.”

Over the next couple of days Chad and I were both busy filming our videos. I shot mine in Vegas while Chad shot his in Blue Bay Harbor. Eric didn’t really want his car leaving town. I also got my schedule for the next few weeks from Holly. It was jam packed and I was going to be all over the place. I had interviews all over from New York to Nashville to LA and so many places in between. I wasn’t sure how this would work with Nemesis still on the loose. I called Serena to get her advice. For all her flakiness she was a good leader, not that I’d ever admit that out loud.

“Hello?” Serena answered.

“Hey, so I got my schedule from Holly. I’m going to be doing a lot of interviews. I’m not sure how this will work with Nemesis out there.” I said.

“Don’t worry about it. It’ll be fine.”

“But you have an album coming out too. We both can’t be jetting all over.”

“My album is delayed until January.”

“What? Why?”

“Nemesis. You’re right, we can’t afford to have me promoting my album right now.”

“So you delayed your album?”

“Yeah.”

“Should I do the same?”

“No. You shouldn’t. That’s why I did it. I’m leader and it’s my job to make sure Nemesis is under control. You do your work and if it gets dire we’ll call you. I can handle it.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“Wow. OK. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome. Now sell the crap out of that album.”

I smiled, “Thanks Serena.”

I hung up and just looked at the phone. I was in shock. Serena had delayed her album by several months so I could release mine. It was a horrible career move for her because her single had been out since spring. I couldn’t believe she’d risk her album flopping like that. She really was one of the best women I’d ever known.

The next day I headed to the book store. I was going to be flying a lot and so I wanted to have some way of keeping myself entertained. Soon as I walked in the store, the first thing I saw on the new books rack was the book that Michelle’s former co-star had written. It was actually published. I sighed. Michelle was enough of a mess right now. She didn’t need this...at all.

I walked over to the manga section. Yeah, I know, I’m almost 30 but I still love comics and manga. I turned the corner and when I did I saw Hunter standing there, flipping through a copy of ‘Parasite’.

“Classic.” I said.

“Raye, hi.” He said as he looked up.

“How’s it going?”

“Been better.”

“Yeah, I heard about you and Ronny. I’m sorry.”

“How did you hear? Oh...Michelle?”

“Well, it’s all over the news for one thing...but Ronny is also crashing at Amara’s for another.”

“Right, news. I forget the celebrity thing sometimes.”

“So you holding up ok?”

“I guess considering I lost my girlfriend and got rejected by my ex.”

“Your ex? Cam or Mich?”

“Mich. I tried to get her back and she rejected me.”

“Oh...seriously? Wow...that’s gonna make Blake and Tori’s wedding awkward.”

“Yeah, but it’s my brother’s day. I’m gonna leave Mich alone at the wedding.”

“Right. That’s probably a good idea. Why did Mich reject you anyway?”

“I have no idea. Actually, yeah I do. It’s Jon...he has her mind all twisted again.”

I sighed, “Yeah, he does...but if there’s one thing I’ve learned about Michelle it’s that when Jon gets in her head nothing else matters. But she also snaps out of it...eventually.”

“I just don’t know how she can continue to see him after what he did to her.”

“I gave up trying to understand Jon and Mich years ago.”

Hunter made a face, “Yeah, I guess.”

“Listen, you look like you could use a friend and I’m getting hungry. There’s a great sushi place across the street, you want to grab some lunch, my treat?”

“You sure?”

“Yeah, come on.”

“Ok.” Hunter nodded.

We went to the restaurant across the street and ordered some sushi rolls. As we ate we talked.

“So how are things going with...Mia?”

“Right, well, about the same.”

“Not good?”

“No. Rini is still under her control and as long as she has Rini we can’t send Harley back and that’s risks the whole timeline.”

“I met Harley. She’s something else.”

I laughed, “She nice.”

“She reminds me of Michelle.”

“I think she probably has a lot of her father in her.”

“Who is her father?”

“No idea, but there’s just some ways she so vastly different from Mich that it has to come from her father.”

“Hmm...”

“You’re still wondering if she’s your daughter?”

“Yeah. I can’t help but wonder.”

“Well, she does kinda look like you I guess.”

“She looks like Michelle.”

“I guess.”

“How are you doing? It’s got to be hard to put out an album while fighting Mia.”

“Yeah, to say the least...it’s nice to talk to someone about this outside the team.”

“You don’t talk to Chad?”

“He doesn’t know.”

“Really? You never told him?”

“No. I figured it was best he not know.”

“I guess I can see wanting to keep that separate but it’s a big secret to keep from someone you love.”

I nodded, “Yeah, it really is.”

“You should tell him.”

“Probably, but after all this time I think it would do more harm than good.”

“You may be right, but you should still tell him.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“Oh crap.” Hunter sighed as he looked out the window.

“It’s raining.” I said.

“Yeah, and I rode my bike here. It’s gonna be a wet ride home.”

“And dangerous. You shouldn’t ride a motor bike in the rain. Let me take you home. You can find a way to get your bike when it dries up.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course.”

“Ok, thanks Raye.” Hunter said.

“So how’s the racing?”

“Good. Blake and I alternate between #1 and 2. We’re the best on the circuit right now.”

“That’s awesome.”

“Yeah, but people seem more focused on who I’m with that my racing.”

“Welcome to the world of celebrity.”

“Yeah, that’s the only part of the job I hate.”

“I know the feeling. Especially having the connection to Michelle that you have it has to be bad.”

“Yeah, she did put me on everyone’s radar.”

“Yeah, I get asked more about her antics than I do my music. I love her to death but it gets old...quickly.”

“I can see that. Her antics do attract attention.”

“To say the least.”

“So then let me ask you about your music. Are you excited about the new album?”

“Extremely.”

“It’s your first country album, right?”

“Yeah, it is...first solo one anyway. I put a lot of work into it, but I’m so proud of it.”

“That’s awesome. I can’t wait to hear it.”

“I don’t expect it to sell well at first.”

“Why?”

“It’s coming out the same day as Jon’s album. He’ll out sell me without breaking a sweat.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Yeah, I do actually.”

“Who picked the date?”

I sighed, “I did and I started promoting it before I knew Jon’s album was coming out the same day.”

“Ouch.”

“Yeah. I’m not expecting massive sales.”

“It could do better than you think.”

“Maybe.”

"I don't know why anyone would want Jon's album anyway. He's a washing up rock star."

I laughed, "He's hardly washed up. He's still one of the biggest selling acts in the world."

"Eh, the masses are asses."

I laughed harder, "You really hate him don't you?"

"You have no idea how much."

"If it makes you feel any better I think you're way more attractive than he is."

"Thanks Raye." Hunter smiled.

"You ready to go?"

"Sure."

"OK, let me pay and we'll get out of here."

I drove Hunter to his apartment. We talked more freely on the way since there was no one to over hear. It was so nice.

We pulled up to his building.

"You want to come in? It's still raining pretty hard and it's not safe to drive in rain either." He said.

I nodded, "OK."

I pulled into a parking place and turned the car off then followed Hunter inside.

"Make yourself at home." He said as we walked into the living room.

"Nice place." I said as I looked around.

"Thanks. You can watch TV or something if you want."

"No, I'm ok. Thank you."

"Well...we need something to do until the rain stops...you want to play me some of the songs on your new album?"

"You have a guitar?"

"Yes ma'am I do as it so happens."

I smiled, "OK."

Hunter got his guitar and handed it to me. I tuned it then started to play my new single "Sooner or Later". Hunter sat and listened.

"Wow, that was awesome." He said when I finished.

"Thanks. I actually wrote that when I was a teenager. I just never got around to recording it." I replied. It was at that moment I realized how close Hunter was actually sitting to me. He smelt really good and I had a really weird feeling. I was looking at Hunter in a way I'd never looked at Hunter before. The next thing I knew he leaned forward and put his hand behind my head and kissed me. My mind was racing so fast I couldn't even collect my thoughts. He was a great kisser though. Amazing actually. I felt his other hand on my stomach. He had slid his hand under my shirt and it was like I was jolted back to reality. I pulled away from him. "I can't do this...I have a boyfriend." I stuttered.

Hunter tried to catch his breath, "I'm sorry."

"It's ok, I just...we can't. I can't do this to Chad...or Michelle."

"Michelle is a non issue."

"Michelle would kill me if she knew what we just did."

"She has no say."

"She's my friend. It's not right. Besides, I can't cheat on Chad."

Hunter nodded, "OK."

"I should go."

"It's still raining."

"I'll be fine. I'll see you 'round."

"Ok..."

I grabbed my keys and practically ran back to my car. When I got in the car I started it up but I sat there crying. I felt so horrible about what I just did. I knew why I did it though...it was because I felt a connection to Hunter. It wasn't a real connection but it was the one connection I didn't have with Chad. Hunter knew my secret and could relate. Chad couldn't. Maybe it was time to tell him after all...but if I told him I knew I'd also tell him about the kiss and I knew that would kill him. I had no idea what to do now.