

[PDF] Crescendo (The Hush, Hush Saga)

Becca Fitzpatrick - pdf download free book



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Description:

About the Author Becca Fitzpatrick grew up reading Nancy Drew and Trixie Belden with a flashlight under the covers. She is a member of Sisters in Crime and loves all things mysterious and suspenseful. When not writing, she's most likely prowling sale racks for reject shoes, running, or watching crime dramas on TV. She lives in Colorado.

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CHAPTER1DELPHIC BEACH, MAINE PRESENT DAY

PATCH WAS STANDING BEHIND ME, HIS HANDS on my hips, his body relaxed. He stood two inches over six feet tall and had a lean, athletic build that even loose-fit jeans and a T-shirt couldn't conceal. The color of his hair gave midnight a run for its money, with eyes to match. His smile was sexy and warned of trouble, but I'd made up my mind that not all trouble was bad.

Overhead, fireworks lit up the night sky, raining streams of color into the Atlantic. The crowd oohed and aahed. It was late June, and Maine was jumping into summer with both feet, celebrating the beginning of two months of sun, sand, and tourists with deep pockets. I was celebrating two months of sun, sand, and plenty of exclusive time with Patch. I'd enrolled in one summer school course—chemistry—and had every intention of letting Patch monopolize the rest of my free time.

The fire department was setting off the fireworks on a dock that couldn't have been more than two hundred yards down the beach from where we stood, and I felt the boom of each one vibrate in the sand under my feet. Waves crashed into the beach just down the hill, and carnival music tinkled at top volume. The smell of cotton candy, popcorn, and sizzling meat hung thick in the air, and my stomach reminded me I hadn't eaten since lunch.

"I'm going to grab a cheeseburger," I told Patch. "Want anything?"

"Nothing on the menu."

I smiled. "Why, Patch, are you flirting with me?"

He kissed the crown of my head. "Not yet. I'll grab your cheeseburger. Enjoy the last of the fireworks."

I snagged one of his belt loops to stop him. "Thanks, but I'm ordering. I can't take the guilt."

He raised his eyebrows in inquiry.

"When was the last time the girl at the hamburger stand let you pay for food?"

"It's been a while."

"It's been *never*. Stay here. If she sees you, I'll spend the rest of the night with a guilty conscience."

Patch opened his wallet and pulled out a twenty. "Leave her a nice tip."

It was my turn to raise my eyebrows. "Trying to redeem yourself for all those times you took free food?"

"Last time I paid, she chased me down and shoved the money in my pocket. I'm trying to avoid another groping."

It sounded made up, but knowing Patch, it was probably true.

I hunted down the end of a long line that wrapped around the hamburger stand, finding it near the entrance to the indoor carousel. Judging by the size of the line, I estimated a fifteen-minute wait just to place my order. One hamburger stand on the entire beach. It felt un-American.

After a few minutes of restless waiting, I was taking what must have been my tenth bored look around when I spotted Marcie Millar standing two spots back. Marcie and I had gone to school together since kindergarten, and in the eleven years since, I'd seen more of her than I cared to remember. Because of her, the whole school had seen more of my underwear than necessary. In

junior high, Marcie's usual MO was stealing my bra from my gym locker and pinning it to the bulletin board outside the main offices, but occasionally she got creative and used it as a centerpiece in the cafeteria—both my A cups filled with vanilla pudding and topped with maraschino cherries. Classy, I know. Marcie's skirts were two sizes too small and five inches too short. Her hair was strawberry blond, and she had the shape of a Popsicle stick—turn her sideways and she practically disappeared. If there was a scoreboard keeping track of wins and losses between us, I was pretty sure Marcie had double my score.

"Hey," I said, unintentionally catching her eye and not seeing any way around a bare-minimum greeting.

"Hey," she returned in what scraped by as a civil tone.

Seeing Marcie at Delphic Beach tonight was like playing *What's Wrong with This Picture?* Marcie's dad owned the Toyota dealership in Coldwater, her family lived in an upscale hillside neighborhood, and the Millars took pride in being the only citizens of Coldwater welcomed into the prestigious Harraseeket Yacht Club. At this very minute, Marcie's parents were probably in Freeport, racing sailboats and ordering salmon.

By contrast, Delphic was a slum beach. The thought of a yacht club was laughable. The sole restaurant came in the form of a whitewashed hamburger stand with your choice of ketchup or mustard. On a good day, fries were offered in the mix. The entertainment slanted toward loud arcades and bumper cars, and after dark, the parking lot was known to sell more drugs than a pharmacy.

Not the kind of atmosphere Mr. and Mrs. Millar would have their daughter polluting herself in.

"Could we move any slower, people?" Marcie called up the line. "Some of us are starving to death back here."

"There's only one person working the counter," I told her.

"So? They should hire more people. Supply and demand."

Given her GPA, Marcie was the last person who should be spouting economics.

Ten minutes later, I'd made progress, and stood close enough to the hamburger stand to read the word **MUSTARD** scribbled in black Magic Marker on the communal yellow squirt bottle. Behind me, Marcie did the whole shifting-weight-between-hips-and-sighing thing.

"Starving with a capital S," she complained.

The guy in line ahead of me paid and carried off his food.

"A cheeseburger and a Coke," I told the girl working the stand.

While she stood over the grill making my order, I turned back to Marcie. "So. Who are you here with?" I didn't particularly care who she'd come with, especially since we didn't share any of the same friends, but my sense of courtesy got the better of me. Besides, Marcie hadn't done anything overtly rude to me in weeks. And we'd stood in relative peace the past fifteen minutes. Maybe it was the beginning of a truce. Bygones and all that.

She yawned, as if talking to me was more boring than waiting in line and staring at the backs of

people's heads. "No offense, but I'm not in a chatty mood. I've been in line for what feels like five *hours*, waiting on an incompetent girl who obviously can't cook two hamburgers at once."

The girl behind the counter had her head ducked low, concentrating on peeling premade hamburger patties from the wax paper, but I knew she'd heard. She probably hated her job. She probably secretly spat on the hamburger patties when she turned her back. I wouldn't be surprised if at the end of her shift, she went out to her car and wept.

"Doesn't your dad mind that you're hanging out at Delphic Beach?" I asked Marcie, narrowing my eyes ever so slightly. "Might tarnish the estimable Millar family reputation. Especially now that your dad's been accepted into the Harraseeket Yacht Club."

Marcie's expression cooled. "I'm surprised your dad doesn't mind you're here. Oh, wait. That's right. He's dead."

My initial reaction was shock. My second was indignation at her cruelty. A knot of anger swelled in my throat.

"What?" she argued with a one-shoulder shrug. "He's dead. It's a fact. Do you want me to lie about the facts?"

"What did I ever do to you?"

"You were born."

Her complete lack of sensitivity yanked me inside out—so much so that I didn't even have a comeback. I snatched my cheeseburger and Coke off the counter, leaving the twenty in its place. I wanted badly to hurry back to Patch, but this was between me and Marcie. If I showed up now, one look at my face would tell Patch something was wrong. I didn't need to drag him into the middle. Taking a moment alone to collect myself, I found a bench within sight of the hamburger stand and sat down as gracefully as I could, not wanting to give Marcie the power to ruin my night. The only thing that could make this moment worse was knowing she was watching, satisfied she'd stuffed me into a little black hole of self-pity. I took a bite of cheeseburger, but it left a bad taste in my mouth. All I could think of was dead meat. Dead cows. My own dead father.

I threw the cheeseburger into the trash and kept walking, feeling tears slip down the back of my throat.

Hugging my arms tightly at the elbows, I hurried toward the shack of bathrooms at the edge of the parking lot, hoping to make it behind a stall door before the tears started falling. There was a steady line trickling out of the women's room, but I edged my way through the doorway and positioned myself in front of one of the grime-coated mirrors. Even under the low-watt bulb, I could tell my eyes were red and glassy. I wet a paper towel and pressed it to my eyes. What was Marcie's problem? What had I ever done to her that was cruel enough to deserve this?

Drawing a few stabilizing breaths, I squared my shoulders and constructed a brick wall in my mind, placing Marcie on the far side of it. What did I care what she said? I didn't even like her. Her opinion meant nothing. She was rude and self-centered and attacked below the belt. She didn't know me, and she definitely didn't know my dad. Crying over a single word that fell from her mouth was a waste.

Get over it, I told myself.

I waited until the red rimming my eyes faded before leaving the restroom. I roamed the crowd, looking for Patch, and found him at one of the ball toss games, his back to me. Rixon was at his side, probably wagering money on Patch's inability to knock over a single weighted bowling pin. Rixon was a fallen angel who had a long history with Patch, and their ties ran deep to the point of brotherhood. Patch didn't... --This text refers to the edition.

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