



BONUS CONTENT

The Original Chapter Three from
Crescendo

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The sequel to the *New York Times*
bestseller, *Hush, Hush*

Available wherever books are sold!

In the original third chapter of Crescendo, the nature of Patch and Nora's relationship was more straightforward and Patch's intentions were more transparent. Also, the conversation between Patch and Nora revealed too much, too soon about Scott Parnell. In the final version, there is more suspense surrounding Scott's character as well as both his and Patch's motives. If you want to know what those turned out to be and what happens to Nora, pick up a copy of Crescendo to find out!

Chapter Three

I went to the kitchen, flipped on the light and my eyes automatically went to the scrap of paper left on the counter. *Meet me in the parking lot.* The note was scrawled in Patch's lazy hand.

I pocketed the note and walked to the bay window in the living room. Patch's black Jeep Commander idled at the curb in front of the building, a fine drizzle sifting down through the headlights.

I dialed Patch's cell.

"I thought we were no longer spending time together," I said, sounding a tiny bit snobbish.

Obviously I was still insulted and confused.

“We've got a problem.”

“What kind of problem?”

“Change into dry clothes and come down.”

“And if I don't?”

“You're still mad at me.” There was a touch of smile in his voice.

“I am not mad at you! So what if you called it quits between us?”

More smile. “Called it quits? You thought we were together? Officially?”

My face sizzled. “No!” Of course I thought we were officially together. Patch told me he wasn't seeing other girls, and I wasn't seeing other guys, which meant *together*.

“Change and come down,” Patch said, “or I'll come up and change you myself.”

“Very funny.”

On the other side of the bay window, Patch swung out of the Jeep.

“Okay, okay!” I said. “I'll be down in five minutes.”

In the bathroom I peeled out of my clothes and hung them over the shower rod to dry. I toweled off and walked down the hall to my bedroom, but the door didn't open. By the way the knob refused to give, I could tell it had been locked from the inside.

I dialed Patch.

“While you were in here planting your note, you locked me out of my bedroom,” I said. “And what were you doing in my bedroom anyway?”

“I didn't go near your bedroom. Is it a standard lock?”

“Yes.”

“Do you have a hairpin?”

“No, and I don't have a paper clip either.”

“I'll come up and take a look after we're finished. We're already late.”

I spent a split moment wondering what we were late for, but I had a more pressing concern. “I

don't have any clothes. Not even underwear. I'm wearing my towel—that's it.”

“Is that an invitation to come up?”

The phone slipped an inch through my fingers. “Just a complaint. I need to get inside my closet.”

“Do you want my help?”

I wanted clean, dry clothes. If I had to allow Patch into my apartment while wearing only a towel, so be it. *Nothing* was going to happen. This was just an awkward case of having no one but an incredibly hot and utterly unavailable guy to rely on in a dire circumstance.

“I'm coming up,” Patch said.

I squeezed back into my wet clothes just as there was a knock at the front door.

“Is that you?” I called to Patch through the door.

“No, it's Jack the Ripper.”

Which wasn't funny because although I'd never seen a photograph of Jack the Ripper, it wouldn't be hard to imagine him looking similar to Patch. Dark, unruly hair. Piercing black eyes. A mouth that strayed past decent when it smiled.

I opened the door and Patch strolled in. He was wearing frayed jeans and a gray shirt rolled to the elbows. His standard grungy ball cap completed the look.

He looked me over. “Where'd the towel go?”

I said, “Do your thing, I'll get dressed, and we can be out of here in five minutes.”

“My thing takes a little more than five minutes,” Patch said. “Give me twenty, and I promise I'll make it worth it.”

“Just unlock the door.”

“For the record,” Patch said, walking down the hall toward my room, “I didn't break up with you. I said we should cool things until after Cheshvan.”

“You said we shouldn't see anymore of each other.”

“I said we shouldn't *be* seen together.”

“So . . . we are together?”

Patch stopped and looked over his shoulder, our eyes connecting. “I'm not kissing other girls, if that's what you're asking.”

My pulse quickened.

“This isn't just about Cheshvan,” I said. “We both know you're not giving me the whole story. If you think I didn't notice you've been coming around a lot less, think again.” This wasn't a lame accusation. The past two days, I'd barely seen Patch. I missed having him intersect my life at spontaneous moments during the day, and I missed saying good-night after dark.

“You don't need the whole story.”

“You're infuriating.”

He gave the faintest smile. “It's a safety issue.”

“Since when are you afraid of danger?”

“Since it involves you.”

A feathery chill rippled clear to my bones. “Last year I was chased down by a vengeful killer *and* your psychotic ex—I can handle danger.”

Patch backed me against the wall. His hands were on my shoulders, his body one millimeter away from touching mine. A drop of rain slid from his hair and landed like ice on my collarbone.

“There's all kinds of danger,” he said, his lips brushing mine. “You've barely dipped your toes in.”

Then he let go, gripped the bedroom door handle, put his shoulder firmly to the door and opened it with a splintering crack. He flipped the light switch, but the room stayed dark.

“Light's burned out,” Patch said. “If you have a spare, I'll change it now.”

I squeezed past him and went for the closet, feeling my way down the rack of clothes. “I'll fix it later. What are we late to?” Closing the closet door between us, I tugged on a pair of jeans, a layering

tee and a hoodie. Because it was raining, I opted for tennis shoes and a ponytail, and discarded the idea of a fresh coat of mascara.

“I looked into the gang Scott Parnell was involved with in Portland,” Patch said. “I’m being stonewalled. Nobody wants to talk. Nobody’s giving me any information.”

“Maybe you didn’t ask very nicely,” I said through the door.

“I never ask nicely, Angel.”

“You ask *me* nicely.”

He laughed softly, intimately. It awakened a smile in me...and then I rolled my eyes. Falling under Patch’s spell was the last thing I needed to do right now, especially trapped in a dark room with him. A room whose primary piece of furniture was a bed.

I buttoned the top of my jeans and opened the door. “Ready.”

Streetlight filtered through the window on the far side of the room. Patch was stretched out on my bed, hands folded behind his head. My pillow was tucked beneath him, promising his scent would linger there later when I tried to sleep. And right then I knew exactly what I’d dream about.

I shook off speculating further details. Obviously I still had feelings for Patch, but I didn’t want to be the dog that chased its tail, running in circles and driving itself mad for something that was out of reach. “So what’s the deal with Scott and the gang in Portland?” I asked.

Patch swung his feet off the side of the bed. “That’s what we’re going to find out.”

“Do I get any more details?”

“I’ll explain on the way.”

We took the stairs down, exited the building and jogged across the parking lot through the rain. I was about to open the passenger side door to the Jeep when Patch gripped my elbow, stopping me. He pressed something on his key fob and said, “Now it’s safe.”

“What was that all about?”

“I took my security up a notch. I wanted to make it hard for someone to tamper with the Jeep.

It's my job to protect you." He looked sideways. "I take my job seriously."

I couldn't tell if my shudder was from his words, or the rain seeping through to my skin.

"Tell me what you know about Scott," I said.

"I think we're looking at something a little more organized than a gang."

I *knew* it! "The mob?"

Patch shook his head, smiling faintly. "For now, let's call it a society. A highly organized, highly functional society."

"You mean a secret society?"

"I mean a blood society. Nobody wants to tell me anything, which means the society instills a decent amount of fear, and they've got something to hide."

"So what are we going to do?"

"We're going to encourage Scott to open up. Right now, he knows more than we do. We're going to change that."

This sounded slightly more *Godfather* than I preferred.

"What, exactly, are we going to do?" I asked, envisioning Patch dragging Scott into a dark alley and shooting him in the kneecaps until he spat out every last secret he'd ever kept.

"Drive to Springvale and stop for a game of pool downtown."

Springvale was roughly the size of Coldwater, and about twenty minutes farther inland. "I thought we couldn't be seen together in public?"

"We aren't going in together. You'll go in alone, act pleasantly surprised when you see Scott, and stick to him all night."

"How do you know Scott will be there?"

Patch pushed the key into the ignition and started the engine. "Scott has a gambling problem."

"And you don't?"

The corner's of Patch's mouth tilted up. "The difference is, I win."

“Okay, I’ll go in and act surprised. What are you going to do?”

He slid on a pair of aviator sunglasses and put the Jeep in reverse. “If I told you, it would ruin the surprise.”

“Why do I always have to be surprised?”

He grinned. “You’re cute when you’re surprised.”