

## **Unexpected**

*By Deborah Crabtree*

She blinked a few times, getting used to the bright sunlight that invaded her deep sleep. Michelle's brain hadn't actually started working when she looked at the clock that read 6:54. Panic came suddenly when her brain finally started working properly.

"6:54!" Michelle cried out loud as she jumped out of bed and quickly began dressing herself. Today was Friday, and school started at 7:30. Apparently, Michelle's alarm hadn't gone off and now she was going to have to high tail it to school.

"Ugh!" Michelle voiced her frustration at the slow car that deterred her from speeding. She was never late for school – never. And this day wouldn't be any different, she assured herself. The time was now 7:16 and it made Michelle more and more nervous with every minute that ticked by. In a few minutes, she was turning into the school's parking lot and searching for an empty space. When she finally found one, she parked, rather crookedly, and rushed out of her car with her backpack. Michelle ran through the halls and then slowed down right before her classroom. She walked in at exactly 7:30, just like nothing had happened.

Being virtually invisible made Michelle's entrance less noticeable than it could have been. Class hadn't started yet so the students were still talking and laughing. Michelle made her way to her seat beside Jessica, trying not to attract attention, but she failed. Jessica turned around from her other conversation and greeted Michelle cheerfully, "Hey!"

Michelle gave a small half smile, "Hey, Jess." She wasn't really close to Jessica, but Jessica was probably the closest thing she had to a friend. That is, besides Christy, but she moved away four years ago.

“Where have you been? Normally you’re like fifteen minutes early.”

So much for not being noticed. “Oh, I lost track of time this morning.”

“I do that sometimes. Hey, are you going to come to the bonfire party tonight?”

“Um, I don’t think so,” Michelle didn’t like being outside, and wasn’t a big fan of parties.

“Aw, come on -”

Before Jessica could finish, Mr. Gurley, their teacher, started the class.

Michelle had already done the homework for the next couple of chapters, so it was kind of boring. When Mr. Gurley finally stopped talking and class was over, Michelle began gathering her books quickly. Maybe Jessica wouldn’t try to resume the conversation that had been interrupted. “Michelle, I really think you should come to the party,” Or maybe she would.

Michelle sighed, “I don’t know, Jess. Parties aren’t really my kind of thing.”

The two girls stood up together and made their way out of the classroom, “But it will be fun -”

“I don’t like being outside either.”

“Oh, come on! You never do anything. It’s your senior year, you should be doing tons of things with your fellow seniors.” Jessica touched Michelle’s arm to make her stop walking, and looked her in the eyes, “Please, just consider it?”

“Fine.”

She grinned. “Great! The party starts at 7. Call me for directions!” Jessica began walking towards her next class.

“But wait,” Michelle raised her voice to yell over the other loud students, “what if

I don't go?"

Jessica turned around while still walking, "Call me for directions!"

With a roll of her eyes, Michelle started walking to her second class. Today wasn't going so great. First, Michelle was late (sort of) for school and now she was probably going to have to go to this bonfire, unless she could come up with a really good excuse for Jessica to let her back out. She wasn't really paying attention to her surroundings when Michelle suddenly collided with someone. "Oo oof!" And her books went everywhere.

"Oh, gosh! I'm so sorry!" A male voice apologized.

Michelle was picking up her books so quickly that she almost didn't bother to see who she had bumped into, "No, it's fine. It was my fault." When she actually looked up, Michelle saw who it was. A.J. Brock, the stuck up, conceited, jerk of a quarterback that everyone in the school was obsessed or in love with. Well, everyone except Michelle. She wasn't fooled by his baby blue eyes or his smooth talking ways, and definitely not by his exceptionally good looks. She could feel a lot of people looking at her and A.J. and she didn't like it. Michelle liked being invisible, and wanted to get back to it as soon as possible.

A.J. handed Michelle her last book and she took it quickly, "Thanks. Well," Michelle felt awkward, "Bye, I guess." She walked off hurriedly and finally got into the haven of her Physics class.

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After lunch, the day moved by rather quickly with no more unusual occurrences, much to Michelle's preference. Michelle didn't like change all that much, even though

she knew it was inevitable. The drive back to her house went by pretty fast and Michelle was glad to be home. Her parents weren't home from work yet, so she decided to relax before finishing what little homework she had left for the week. It was around four o'clock when her cell phone rang. It was Jessica. Michelle flipped open her phone and answered it, "Hey, Jess. What's up?"

"You didn't call me for directions."

"No, I didn't. Because I'm not going," she was going to try and be firm.

"Michelle, you aren't going to get out of this. Even if I have to come over there and drag you out of your house." So now Jessica was going to threaten her. *Nice.*

"Please don't make me go." Michelle tried to reason with her, "This is just not my type of thing."

Jessica wasn't going to take any of her excuses, "Yeah, because your type of thing is sitting at home by yourself and doing homework."

"I'm not by myself! My parents -"

"Exactly. Parents don't count. You are by yourself, but not tonight."

She sighed in defeat letting Jessica win. "Fine. I'll go."

"I knew you'd come around!" Jessica was so excited. "What are you going to wear?"

"Um... I don't know? Jeans and a t-shirt?"

"I don't think so. Why don't you come over to my house and I'll let you borrow one of my tops?"

"Why can't I wear my own clothes?"

"Do you want me to come over there and pick something out for you then?"

Michelle sighed - defeat again. "No. I'll come over there. But I still have to ask my mom if I can go. She'll be home soon, though."

"Okay, that's cool. Just get here no later than five thirty, all right?"

"All right."

"Great! I'll see you then!"

"Bye, Jess." After Michelle hung up the phone, she went upstairs to change into her nicer jeans. Secretly, she hoped her mom would say she couldn't go, but if Michelle knew her mother, that probably wouldn't happen. Her mother was always wanting Michelle to be more sociable, and this was pretty darn sociable.

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Michelle pulled into Jessica's drive way at around 5:15. Unfortunately, her mom was ecstatic that Michelle had shown interest and immediately told her that she could go. As she walked towards the front door, Jessica was already standing in the doorway waiting. "Hurry up! You walk so slow!" Jessica complained.

The two girls walked upstairs to Jessica's room and as soon as the door was closed, Jessica began pulling different tops out of her closet. "Let's see... You could wear this one. Or this one. Oh, this one's cute! Hmm... and this one." Michelle just stared at the different shirts that were all over Jessica's bed. She tried on a few different shirts - some were too tight, some were too low cut, and some just weren't 'Michelle'. They finally settled on a short-sleeved, turquoise top that fit Michelle perfectly. After Jessica convinced Michelle to put on a little makeup, they were ready to go at 6:30.

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The party had already started by the time the girls arrived. Some people were

around the bonfire roasting hotdogs and making s'mores, while others were socializing in their own cliques. After a while, teams were made for a game of capture the flag.

Michelle definitely didn't want to play, so she sat by the fire to watch everyone else.

Eventually the game ended, but then a lot of people wanted to play sardines. It was a game kind of like hide and seek, but instead of everyone hiding, only one person hid and everyone else had to find that person and hide with them until there was only one person left looking.

Everyone scattered to look for the guy that was hiding, which left Michelle wandering aimlessly by herself. She wasn't really looking for the guy that much, but if she happened to find him then that was okay. About twenty minutes later, Michelle realized that she was in the woods and no one was around her. She looked in all directions trying to find the light from the bonfire, but didn't see anything. The moonlight was Michelle's only way to see where she was going, but it didn't help, because she was lost.

A shiver went up her spine and the realization came that Michelle had forgotten her jacket, so she held herself tighter trying to keep warm. Being alone in the woods was scary enough, but being lost and alone in the woods was worse. A twig snapped, making Michelle jump. She turned around in the direction that she thought it came from. When no other noises were heard, Michelle slowly turned around, only to run smack into something hard. A scream almost escaped her lips before she realized it was a person, and that person was holding on to her shoulders.

"We have got to stop running into each other!" The male voice sounded familiar.

"A.J.?" Michelle was shocked.

“Yeah. We ran into each other in the hallway today, right? What’s your name?”

“Michelle,” she said shyly.

“Cool, it’s nice to meet you. Well, I’m sorry if I scared you. You are the first person I’ve come across in a good fifteen minutes, so I was going to see if you had any idea where you were going.”

Michelle finally looked up at A.J., “No, I have no idea. I’m pretty sure that I’m lost.”

A.J. chuckled and rubbed his neck, “Well, I guess that makes two of us.”

This was just great. Now she wasn’t lost in the woods by herself, but lost in the woods with A.J. and she didn’t know which was worse.

“Let’s just try to find our way back to the bonfire,” Michelle suggested.

“Sounds like a plan. I’m sure we’ll find it sooner or later.” A.J. started walking in one of the many directions. Michelle followed, hoping it would be sooner rather than later. The two walked for a while, not seeming to make any progress. There was a huge silence between them. A.J. didn’t know what to say, and Michelle didn’t want to talk to him.

Then A.J. broke the silence, “You don’t like me, do you?”

“What?” Michelle wasn’t sure exactly what he was asking.

“I mean, I just feel like you hate me or something. It’s weird and I don’t know why I feel it, but it just seems like... you’re mad at me,” he tried to explain it, but didn’t think he had succeeded.

Michelle thought about what he said. He was partially right, and partially wrong. After a few minutes, she finally spoke, “I don’t *hate* you. I just... Um...”

“Think I’m a jerk?” He finished her thought.

“Well...”

“You think I’m a stuck up football jock that only cares about himself. Is that it?”

Dang. He sure hit that nail right on its head. Michelle looked at the ground, embarrassed that A.J. had read her that easily. “Sorry, but I only judge you by the way I’ve seen you act. And the people you hang out with.”

“Hey, it’s okay. I understand, but I’m not like that at all.”

“Mhm,” was all she could think of to say.

“Wait, aren’t you a Christian?”

Michelle gave him a weird look, wondering what he was getting at, “Yes.”

“Christians aren’t supposed to judge people, are they?” His voice made it sound like an innocent question, but Michelle knew exactly what he meant.

“Well,” she tried to think of a good argument, “Christians aren’t perfect.”

“True.” A.J. gave her a look.

“What?!” Michelle somewhat shrieked. “Okay. Okay, I’m sorry for judging you. I shouldn’t have. You’re not as bad as I thought.” She paused, “I suppose.”

He laughed, “You suppose? And what’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means that I still don’t know you enough to make an accurate opinion.”

“Oh,” was all he replied with.

The silence returned as they continued to walk in no particular direction. Wind whipped around them, making Michelle shiver even more with every icy, cold gush. A.J. noticed her shivering and slid off his jacket. When he offered it to her, Michelle wondered if she should take it, but another gush a wind made her decision quite easy, and

she quickly took the jacket.

“Thanks,” she told him quietly as she slipped into the jacket that swallowed her whole.

He smiled, “Don’t mention it.”

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“It seems like we’ve been walking for forever.” Michelle’s feet hurt and it didn’t feel like they were getting anywhere.

“I know. It’s been like an hour since we started playing Sardines,” A.J. pulled out his phone to check the time.

“A.J.!” She yelled at him. “You have a cell phone!?”

He looked at her, completely confused. “Why are you mad at -”

“You could have called someone and told them that we were lost!”

A.J. grinned sheepishly, “Oops?”

“Oops is right.” Michelle glared at him. “Call someone.”

A.J. dialed a number and she hoped that he was calling a trustworthy friend. Unfortunately, her hopes dissolved when he started talking to the person on the other line. “Hey, Bobby!... I got lost in the woods, dude!... I’m with Michelle... Michelle, she goes to our school... Never mind. I need you to come find us... Bobby?... Hello? Bobby?! Oh... crap.”

That didn’t sound good. “Why crap? What happened?”

“My phone died,” he gave her a worried look.

Michelle sighed and crossed her arms, “So what now?”

He shrugged, “I guess we just keep walking. Maybe we’ll come across

civilization eventually.”

“All right.”

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It was getting later in the night and Michelle felt as if she was almost sleep walking. “A.J.,” she said drowsily.

“Yeah?” He answered, guiding her with his hand on her back.

“It’s past my bedtime,” Her speech was slurred.

A.J. smiled, “I know. I’m tired too.” His arm was around her now, partly to make sure she didn’t fall, and partly to make himself a little warmer.

“A.J.,” Michelle mumbled again.

“Yes?”

“Is A.J. your real name... or just a nickname?”

“Um, it’s my real name. Kind of.”

She giggled. “Kind of?”

“Yeah, it’s my initials.”

“Really? What is your real name?” Michelle was definitely delirious. It was really late for Michelle, and she would be lucky if she remembered any of this tomorrow.

“I don’t want to say.”

“What? Is it an embarrassing name?” She looked up at him.

“Yes,” he laughed. “Yes, it is.”

“Oh, tell me. I won’t tell anybody. I promise.”

“Fine. It’s Adrian James Brock.”

Michelle laughed, “It’s not that bad. Try being called Lorraine!”

A.J. laughed, too, “Is that *your* real name?”

“Yep. Lorraine Michelle Sanders.” She opened her eyes really wide, trying to stay awake. “You know, I was wrong about you.”

“You were?”

“Yeah, you’re not so bad. Not even conceited.”

He laughed a little, knowing that she was somewhat delirious, “Well, thanks.”

“Hey, A.J.”

“Yes?” A.J. wondered what random thing she would say next.

“Is that a fire?”

“What?!”

“Up there,” she pointed.

A.J. gasped, “Michelle, that’s the bonfire. We’re not lost anymore!”

“Woohoo...” she said with as much enthusiasm as she could muster.

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They finally made it out of the woods and walked towards the bonfire to get warm. Suddenly, the two heard a shrill, “Michelle!” and they both looked to see Jessica running towards them. Michelle was too tired to say anything, so she just let the hysterical Jessica ramble on, “Where have you been? I’ve been trying to call you! And you wouldn’t answer! I was so worried about you! What were you thinking?!”

Michelle let her talk for a few more minutes before she interrupted, “Jess, A.J. and I got lost in the woods. Then his phone died and I left mine in your car. Sorry.”

Jessica’s attitude took a 180 turn, “You and A.J.?”

Michelle could feel A.J. smiling and heard Jessica’s suggesting tone, “It’s not

what you think. Can we just go home now?"

"Did you two ride together?" A.J. asked the two girls.

"Yeah," Jessica answered, "Michelle's car is at my house. Why?"

"Because I don't think she's in any condition to drive. She's really tired."

Michelle looked at him, "I could drive just fine. I'm not *that* tired."

Jessica looked at Michelle, "She does look pretty tired."

"I'll take her home, if that's okay?" A.J. offered.

"Yeah, that's fine," Jessica agreed.

"No, it's not." Michelle protested. "My car would still be at your house."

"Well, couldn't you just get it in the morning before you go to work?" Jessica was very persuasive.

"I guess." Michelle sighed - defeated for the third time.

After Jessica told him how to get to Michelle's house, they retrieved Michelle's phone from Jessica's car, and A.J. and Michelle walked sluggishly to his truck. By the time A.J. got into the driver's seat and cranked the car, Michelle had already fallen asleep. The next thing Michelle knew, A.J. was waking her up, "Michelle, you're home."

"Really?" It seemed too good to be true.

"Yeah," he helped her out of the truck and walked her to the door. "Well, I guess I'll see you later. Tonight was fun."

Michelle had to agree, "Yeah, it really was. Thanks for taking me home."

"No problem. You go inside and get some sleep." A.J. didn't know - maybe it was because it seemed like they had been through so much, or maybe he just felt like it - but he kissed her forehead.

She smiled at him and then went inside her house. As she took the steps of getting ready for bed, Michelle thought about how the night had turned out. Getting lost in the woods wasn't exactly what she had expected to do at the party, but it was probably the best thing that could have happened. And A.J. wasn't the stuck up, conceited, jerk of a quarterback she thought he was. No. A.J. was something totally unexpected.