

# ASHLEY

Nice shirt.” Ashley Walters smiled as she passed Michael Ellis. She was paying a compliment to his T-shirt for the band the Who. It was the one where the *O* in the name had an arrow coming out of it, and there was a red, white, and blue bull’s-eye behind it.

“You want it?” Michael replied looking up from his *MacWorld* magazine. Ashley laughed. Her smile was enough to let him know she thought he was okay; that he could keep talking to her.

“I’ll give it you, seriously.” Michael started to lift his shirt up, ignoring the fact

that he was wearing a jacket. Realizing it would be impossible to take off, Michael stopped trying.

“Come on, keep going.” Ashley’s smile became a stern expression. “You *did* offer.”

Michael stared at her. Ashley had really inviting hazel eyes. They went well with her dark complexion and thick brown hair. She wore a pair of white tennis shoes, white shorts, and a red T-shirt.

“Okay, I’ll let you off the hook.” She smiled. “I can see by your jacket that you run for the school. Running’s cool.”

“You like to run?” Michael asked.

Ashley nodded her head.

“You want to run together sometime?” He asked the question before he realized what he was saying.

“You think you can keep up with me?” She jogged in place. “I’m pretty fast.”

“I run the hundred-yard dash.”

“Wow, that’s a humble brag.” She smiled.

Michael liked how she teased him and seemed interested at the same time.

“You’re new here,” Michael stated.

“Do I stand out that much?”

“In a good way.”

Michael had no idea why he was saying all these things. There was something about Ashley. He felt drawn to her. She didn’t seem like the other girls at Willmore High School. He felt like it was okay to talk with her like this.

“Well, I’ve gotta run. Not literally.” She smiled again. Dazzling. “But you better stay in training. Especially if you’re gonna keep up when you take me running.”

“Okay.”

“I’m Ashley.”

“Michael.”

He wanted to set up a time for their run but she was gone.

Michael thought about going after her but he didn't. He had a feeling he would be talking to her again. He just didn't know when, which kind of bothered him.

John walked up. He was wearing the same Willmore High School track jacket that Michael was wearing. It said Willmore across the back and had a runner in the center.

"Who was that girl you were talking to?" John asked.

"That was Ashley."

"She's cute."

Michael continued to watch Ashley as she walked away. Eventually, she blended into the crowd of students.

The school year had basically just started, and Michael thought it was gonna be a great one.