

Broken | 5: The Waterfall

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LILY

“Hey Mason, Mom wan—ahh!” a girl’s voice says, then screams. Mason’s arms wrap around my body, pulling me into him, and I bury my head into his shoulder.

“What?” he snaps.

“I’ll just tell Mom you’re not hungry,” the girl says, and the door closes.

“Oh my god,” I groan, moving off his lap and sitting next to him. “Please tell me that wasn’t one of your sisters.” I can feel my whole face burning.

“It was,” he sighs, throwing his head back. “No one was meant to be home tonight,” he mutters.

“At least we still had our clothes on,” I giggle, grabbing my bottle of wine.

“Yeah. Lucky,” he mutters, rolling his eyes before leaning over me and grabbing the other wine bottle.

No more kissing in case a sister wanders in again, but we sit side by side and hold hands and talk about random stuff—how we don’t really like wine that much, dumb things we did as kids, favorite cereals, and how nice it feels to just sit here and talk.

My heart flutters every time I catch him looking at me.

Once we’re both yawning, he walks me home.

At my door, he leans down for one last kiss, soft and sweet, his lips lingering on mine. “Goodnight, princess,” he murmurs against my lips.

As I watch him walk away, I smile.

I thought my life was ruined when I caught Olly cheating, but these past three weeks have been the best summer I’ve ever had.

The next morning at exactly five forty-five a.m., Mason pulls up and jogs up my stairs.

For the first time, I am up and ready before he arrives.

I wait until he’s about to knock on the door before I fling it open, giving him a fright.

“That wasn’t very nice, princess,” he fake-scolds, clutching his chest.

“Who said I was nice?”

He chuckles as we make our way to his car.

“Why are you up so early?” Mason asks once he starts the short drive.

“Because today I am not going to stop,” I state confidently.

We drive to the trail and Mason and I run together in silence until we get to the part where I normally start complaining and stop.

To be fair, I desperately want to stop, but I’m not going to.

“You sure you got this?” He smirks, picking up the pace a little.

“I got this.” I puff, pushing my body to keep going.

As we near the end, I look over at Mason, who’s starting to look tired too.

“Race ya.” I smirk before taking off into a sprint like he does to me every day.

“What?” I hear him yell from behind me.

Just as I’m about to reach the finish line, arms wrap around my stomach, picking me up off the ground and spinning me around.

“Put me down.” I laugh as he keeps spinning me.

“You cheated.” Mason puffs as he puts me back on my feet.

The second his arms leave my body, I instantly miss them and want them back.

“You’ve cheated every day for the past month,” I counter.

“I would never,” he gasps, looking at me offended, making me laugh harder.

“You did it princess, you didn’t stop.”

“Thanks to you!” I smile.

“You’ve nearly done everything on your list,” he says as we walk slowly back to his car.

“Almost,” I say proudly.

Never in a million years did I think I would be completing a bucket list with Mason Cooper, and having the time of my life while doing it.

But then I remember why I was so determined to run the trail today.

“My parents are coming back tomorrow, though.”

Mason’s smile falls.

“Summer’s almost over.” He shakes his head, trying to smile again. “We’ve still got the whole day ahead of us. Since you’re on a roll, we could check off the last two things.”

I nod, suddenly filled with the same determination I felt this morning.

“Yeah, let’s do it. Let’s finish the list. Waterfall?”

He nods, looking more determined than excited.

I can tell there’s something about this waterfall hike that’s more than just about fun, but I don’t ask.

After a quick stop at our houses to change, we drive for twenty minutes, both of us silent, before pulling up in a forest parking lot.

“It’s a bit of a hike,” Mason explains as we climb out of his car, him grabbing a backpack.

We start walking, still not saying anything more.

“How’d you find this place?” I ask after we’ve been hiking for a while, finally breaking the silence.

“My brother took me here,” he answers quietly.

It takes us another hour before we reach the bottom of the waterfall.

It’s absolutely beautiful.

Trees surround us, a large waterfall breaking through, crashing down into a large body of water surrounded by huge dark-gray rocks.

“It’s magical here,” I whisper, looking around.

“It is,” Mason agrees. “Let’s leave our stuff here and we’ll head up to the jump.”

He puts his backpack on a rock and then pulls his shirt over his head to reveal his perfectly toned and muscular body.

“Do you have your swimsuit on?” he asks.

“Yeah.” I breathe out, shaking my head as I mentally scold myself for getting distracted by seeing him shirtless.

I quickly take off my shoes and clothes, stripping to my black bikini.

I think he lets out an approving little *uh-huh*.

We hike to the top of the waterfall where I look down and internally freak out.

We’re so high up!

“You can still go back down if you want,” Mason offers, and I shake my head.

I grab hold of his hand and squeeze it.

“Just don’t let go, okay? If I’m dying, so are you,” I say, and he winces.

“We’re not dying anytime soon, princess,” he mutters, squeezing my hand back. “Three, two, one.” He counts down before I’m flying through the air.

It feels like I’m falling for ten minutes, but in reality it’s probably only a couple seconds.

The moment my body hits the cold water I lose grip of Mason’s hand.

I kick myself to the surface, seeing Mason already up with a huge smile on his face.

“That was incredible!” I exclaim, swimming over to him.

“Yeah,” he agrees, looking up to the top of where we just jumped from. “Wanna go again?” he asks with a boyish grin plastered on his face.

We jump another two times before Mason suggests we eat something.

We swim to the shore and head over to the rocks by our stuff, and he pulls out four sandwiches from his backpack.

I take a bite of a ham-and-cheese; it’s surprisingly good.

“Did you make these?” I ask.

“Of course!”

I take another bite, eye him skeptically, and say, "You don't seem the chef type."

"I'm a total chef. Michigan starred."

"You mean Michelin starred?"

He laughs and shakes his head. "Okay, busted. My sister Tayla made them."

"I knew it!" I say, punching his arm. "Tell her she makes an awesome chef. And that she has a lazy brother."

"I cannot tell her that or she'll never let it go."

"How old is she?" I ask.

"Fifteen. She's a sweetheart. Gemma's thirteen and scares the shit out of me." He chuckles.

"And your brother? What was his name?" I ask cautiously.

"Callum," he answers quietly. "He was just twenty-one when... He was an addict. He was injecting heroin, but he didn't try to hide it."

Mason's voice shakes. "He threatened to kill himself so many times, Mom just stopped caring. All she did was go to work, come home, and drink."

Tears pool in Mason's eyes, and I scoot over to grab hold of his hand. "But one night he and Mom had a huge fight and he stormed out. I went to bed."

His voice cracks and the tears stream down his face. "I got up the next morning and went into his room and he'd hung himself."

I wrap my arms around Mason, pulling him into me, letting him sob on my shoulder. "I'm sorry you had to go through that," I say, stroking the back of his head as he clings to me.

"When he brought me here, he said it was his favorite place and he'd always wanted to jump off the top of the waterfall, but didn't have the balls," he says, pulling back from me.

"Then two days later he's dead," he mutters, looking back at the waterfall.

"Mason," I whisper, wiping my own tears off my face. "I don't know what to say," I mumble, wishing I did. I wish I could take his pain away.

"You don't have to say anything, princess," he whispers as he takes my hand in his.

And so I don't say anything, just sit with him, stroking his hand with my thumb and watching the waterfall.

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