

Broken | 8: School

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LILY

In homeroom, Ava heads to our usual seats in the back, but I stop around the middle and go sit by the window.

“Why are we sitting here?” she asks, slipping into the seat in front of me.

“I’m not a cheerleader anymore,” I shrug like it’s no big deal. “I’m quitting.”

“What!” she exclaims loudly, gaining the attention of the few students already here.

“I hate it. I only joined for Mom,” I tell her honestly.

“But you were going to be the captain!”

I hear the other students begin to whisper about what she’s just said, making me inwardly groan.

I’m going to be the main focus of gossip on the first day.

“You shouldn’t have to drop cheer because of him,” she counters.

“It’s not because of him,” I state coldly.

I want to text Mason so badly to see how his first day is going.

But I know I can’t—Ava will be on me right away, asking who I’m texting.

Cheerleading and Olly are enough drama for the moment, thank you.

“Babes!” Harry’s voice fills the room before I see him. “Why are we sitting here?” he asks, sliding into the seat next to me.

“Lily’s giving up cheer,” Ava announces.

“You are?” he asks, looking at me with a small frown.

“Apparently, she hates it and only did it for her mom,” she answers for me.

“I’m only dropping cheer. I’m not dropping track and field or volleyball,” I say with an eye roll. “It’s really not such a big deal.”

“Fair enough then,” Harry nods, holding out his fist.

I give it a bump, thankful for the lack of judgment.

My morning classes go by fairly quickly, thankfully.

But in every single class and between classes, at least five different people ask me if I’m really quitting cheer and if me and Olly actually broke up.

By lunchtime, I feel like I’m going to snap if another person asks me the same fucking questions.

Harry and I walk to the cafeteria together, and as expected, he goes straight for the table full of the usual footballers and cheerleaders.

And then I see him for the first time—Olly’s sitting at the far end of the table, laughing at something one of his friends said.

He looks up, and for a moment, our eyes meet.

It’s like he almost nods for me to join out of habit, then remembers.

I feel frozen.

Before I can figure out what to do, Leah slides into the seat beside him, her arm instantly looping through his like she’s claiming him for the whole cafeteria to see.

Her hair’s perfectly curled and she has on bright pink lip gloss.

I bet she spent like two hours getting ready for her big debut.

She notices Olly is looking at me.

She whispers something in his ear that makes him smirk.

No doubt it was about me.

I turn away before they see my cheeks turn red.

I go to sit at a two-person table, hoping like fuck Ava sits by me.

I pull out my lunch and phone to text her but see I have a text from her already saying she's on her way.

"I still can't believe Leah took his side," Ava scowls, looking over to the table in the middle as she sits down across from me.

"There's no side to take, Ava. You can go sit with them if you want," I sigh, looking over and seeing Leah laughing at something Olly just said.

"You know I'm here for you. If you ever need a shoulder to cry on," Ava offers, squeezing my hand.

"Thanks. But I'm actually feeling fine," I fake-smile.

"What happened, Lil?" she asks, giving me her perfected puppy-dog eyes.

"It just wasn't going to work," I shake my head, wanting to tell her about Mason.

"Will you tell me one day?" She sighs, picking at her food.

"One day," I agree, knowing I probably never will.

It's too embarrassing.

My afternoon classes are pretty much just like my mornings until I get to last period.

Gym.

The girls are chatting and the guys are goofing around as we wait for Coach Burns, the PE teacher, to start class.

But it all fades the moment I see Coach Lindsey heading straight for me.

Her expression isn't angry, exactly—it's more concerned.

"Lily," she says, stopping me near the bleachers.

Her voice is firm, but not harsh. "Is it true? Are you quitting the team?"

I sigh, already tired of this conversation. “I just don’t want to cheer anymore.”

Coach Lindsey frowns, crossing her arms. “You’re meant to be the captain, Lily. You’ve worked so hard for this.”

“Make Anastasia captain. She deserves it.”

Her voice softens. “What’s going on? You’re not quitting because of that Kingsley boy, are you?”

“No, of course not.” I snort and roll my eyes, even though I can feel some tears building.

She hesitates, studying me closely.

Before she can say anything more, Coach Burns yells for us to get outside for our warm-up laps.

“I have to go,” I say, turning away quickly.

“Think about it, okay?” she calls after me.

“I already have.”

“Don’t listen to Lindsey,” Harry says, dropping his arm over my shoulder as we walk toward the track. “You do you.”

A mountain of a man walks up.

This is Jock—yes, that’s his real name.

He whistles lowly.

“Harry, did you hear that Mason has gotten in mad shape this summer?” Jock says, looking at me like he’s surprised to see me. “Hey, squirt. How long have you been there?” He smiles.

“Don’t call me that,” I snap, wanting them to keep talking about Mason.

“Who said that?” Harry asks. “I can’t see him getting into shape. He doesn’t even take games seriously.” Harry shakes his head.

“He doesn’t?” I ask, surprised.

“No. He’s always joking around—even his team gets annoyed at him,” Harry answers. “But we’re still gonna destroy him either way. I fucking hate that guy.”

I glance at Harry—he almost never looks this angry.

He really does want to destroy Mason.

“Mom! I’m home!” I call out, dropping my keys onto the side table and dumping my bag.

I run up the stairs calling out to her, even checking her room, which is empty and clean, as if she’d never even returned.

If it wasn’t for the faint smell of her perfume lingering in the air, I would’ve thought I’d dreamed her showing up.

I go back downstairs and call her.

“Hey, Mom, where are you?” I ask.

“I’ve had to go meet Dad,” she says, not even sounding sorry.

“Oh. It’s okay,” I reply, clearing my throat. “When are you back?” I ask.

“I’m not sure. I’ll let you know when I know,” she chirps before hanging up without even a goodbye.

The words echo in my head: *I’ll let you know when I know*. I realize I’m gripping the fridge door harder than I should.

I like my freedom when my parents are gone, but I realize how much I miss and need them too.

I walk into the living room and sink into the couch, curling my legs underneath me. I drum my fingers against the armrest.

I need to talk to someone, but Ava always makes things more dramatic and Harry’s at practice.

Should I text Mason? Why hasn't he reached out? He knows how worried I was about going back to school.

He must be at practice right now too.

I flip through a few movies, paint my nails, and keep checking my phone for a message from Mason.

Long after practice would be over, still nothing. So I text him.

Lily

💬 Hey, so my mom just bailed again. Like, showed up for five seconds and then dipped without even saying goodbye. Said she's 'meeting my dad' like that makes it okay. Oh, yeah, and my dad, he didn't even come or call—wtf? I don't even know when they're coming back. I'm so over this.

It's basically a trauma-vomit, but I hit send before I can second-guess myself and stare at the screen, waiting.

A moment later, the three dots appear, and my heart jumps. But then... nothing. The dots disappear, and no message.

Maybe the rumors about him being a player are true? I don't want to believe it.

Maybe he's busy, I tell myself. Maybe he doesn't know what to say.

I fall asleep that night with my phone propped on the bed beside me, staring at the screen, wanting a message to arrive, but he doesn't send anything.

I fall asleep wondering if I let myself believe in something that was never real.

Next Chapter

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