# 30 | Jumping Jiminy

***Chapter 30: Jumping Jiminy***

Espresso poured through the thick foam of steamed milk, entwined with a caramel drizzle. I inhaled the aroma of co ee to satiate my daily craving.

"Do you need a room?"

Luke broke through the tender moment I shared with my caramel macchiato. He was watching me from the driver's seat of his car.

If he thought I was weird before, it's definitely been confirmed now.

"Not if it makes us even more late for school," I said, eyeing the electric clock on his dashboard.

**8:01 AM**

We're late.

"Now you're concerned with time? You didn't seem too focused on it before."

"That was the BC era. Before Co-ee," I said, reinventing the definition of the Latin calendar.

Luke switched playlists and drove me to school, possessively making sure that I didn't get a speck of co ee on his fancy leather seats. I faked a yelli ower or twice, just to get to him. I enjoy annoying him, like I could to this summer.

These were rare moments. We've returned to our normal pre-summer-camp lives, where Luke hanging out with me is a computational error. He had resumed his place at the top of the hierarchy. And when the view from the top is so beautiful, why would he ever come down?

That's why I enjoyed moments like these. Moments where I would forget that he was Luke Dawson, the basketball hotshot, and think of him as Luke, my friend. They were rare. But they were special.

Sort of. He was still a pain in the ass.

He pulled up to the front of the school steps. "You can get out here and I'll park."

"Why? So that we won't be seen walking in together?"

He sighed. "So that you don't miss any more class than you already have. It's 8.11 and counting."

"Shoot," I cursed, unbuckling my seat belt and sliding out the door.

I ran towards the school's front steps but his voice stopped me.

"Millie," he called out through the open window. "You still think I'm embarrassed by you?"

I stopped and slowly, very slowly, nodded. Why does he care what I think anyway?

"Then come to a party Austin's throwing tonight," he said, "You can meet my friends."

"Tonight?" I exclaimed, "But it's a weekday!"

"I'll pretend you never said that."

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Matt, the co ee bean barista, must not have class first period. What a win. I need to copy his schedule senior year.

That's all I thought while I was begging my way out of another late-with-no-late-slip class entrance I was mid-beg, when the door opened behind me and someone else walked in even later than me.

He didn't apologize. He went straight to an empty seat.

"Excuse me," the teacher said, interrupting my apology. "Last week I specifically said that I will not tolerate tardiness in this class."

"I wasn't here last week," he shrugged, making himself comfortable.

I stared at him alongside the entire class. I didn't think it was possible for anyone to give Luke a run for his looks - but this guy was a challenger. Brown hair that fell over hazel green eyes. A charming megawatt smile and a small nose piercing. **Image above!**

"You must be Jake, our new transfer student," the teacher realized. "Millie, will you just sit down? I'll deal with you later."

I realized then that the empty seat he sat in was the one next to mine. I received anxious stares as I walked towards it.

It's not my fault that no one ever wanted to sit next to me. I never begged to be so unpopular that the seat next to me would be fine for any transfer students who looked like a hollywood bad boy.

"Did you move from LA?" I asked him, as I took my seat.

I thought I was being casual but apparently that's weird.

"Minneapolis," he answered. "Did you randomly guess a city?"

Yes.

I felt nervous with his gaze on me. He had tattoos inked on his arms, signs and symbols that I couldn't read. As the professor continued with class, I buried my head in my open book of Hamlet.

He smelt so good.

"Millie."

I looked up. Was he going to ask me to marry him?

"Do you mind sharing? I haven't bought the book yet."

OK, so maybe not marriage. But he did remember my name - which was rare.

I nervously pushed the book between us. Our fingers touched. I blushed violet.

"Thanks," he said, scooting closer to me.

He was smiling at my reaction to him. I guess because of my experience with Luke, I thought all hot boys would be jerks.

What a pleasant surprise.

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I was thinking about the party Luke invited me to. Party at Austin's. What do I wear?

I could use my 20% employee discount from the store, but the Lola Rae dresses would still be $80+. Think of that in terms of my Co ee Bean allowance. 75 co ees, almost 3 months supply!... which goes to show (a) how much co ee I drink and (b) how good my math is. JK it's an expensive store.

"Hey Flora," I put on a super friendly tone as I approached her that evening. "Do you have a dress I can borrow?"

She was on her laptop in the living room while my mother was doing pilates on a yoga mat nearby.

Flora didn't even look up from her screen. "My dresses are not to be worn for nerd club."

"It's for a party," I explained.

My mother extended her le leg and kicked it to the ceiling with a pointed toe. "Darling, you won't be able to fit into Flora's dresses."

"It doesn't matter," Flora said, "She's lying. There is no party tonight or I would know about it."

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I texted Julia to see if she had a dress I could borrow.

What do you need it for?she texted back.

I replied quickly from my bedroom, For a party. Do you want to come?

Whose party?

Austin's.

Is that a nerd in your mathletes club?

I should have said his surname. Austin Taylor was a big name at school, but Julia expected his to be the last party I'd ever get invited to. I was about to explain, when she sent me another text.

You always like the math nerds. If you want to impress him by taking him somewhere cool, come by Yosna's ar. There'll be a couple people there.

Impressing Austin Taylor was not something either one of us could achieve.

I had very productive plans before the party: Do some homework, work out, organize my desk, take my time doing make up... but I sat in bed watching youtube videos.

The car honked outside. Mum was at work, Flora was out. I was so not ready.

Luke's black jeep wrangler was parked in my driveway. And I was sitting, helplessly, by my mirror. I'm no make-up guru - I tried the whole smokey eye thing but ended up looking like a raccoon. So I wiped my face in make-up remover and that was it.

My phone rang.

"Julia! Thank God! Are you coming over? I desperately need your help!" I said.

"You mean tonight?! I'm sorry. I have your dress, but I'd only make it there in an hour."

I heard voices in the background. She must be at Yosna's already.

Luke honked again outside. He was not patient.

"An hour's too late," I said, still in the turtle neck and jean skirt I was wearing at school today.

"HELLO!" Luke yelled - and I mean yelled through my window.

"COMING!" I yelled back, and then calmly returned to my phone call, "Sorry, you were saying?"

"Uh, do you need to go?"

"Probably," I reluctantly agreed, sta ing my feet into black sneakers, and walking out the front door, "I'll talk to you later. Thanks for a wing to help."

Luke was in his car, looking hot and bothered. His fingers were impatiently tapping the steering wheel. His crystal blue eyes landed on me like lasers and I felt jaw locked.

"Usually girls dress up for a party," he observed as I buckled my seat belt on.

"I had no idea," I sarcastically replied.

"Who gave you the black eye?"

"What? Oh, it's just my make up." I guess I hadn't scrubbed o all the 'smokey eye'.

"I thought makeup was meant to make you look better."

Oh my god.

"Shame there's no makeup for your personality," I said.

He smirked, "Liar. You know that if you could bottle and sell me, you'd be filthy rich."

"And happy because you'd be stuck in a bottle."

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Austin lived in our neighborhood in a two story white house. Bouquets of lilacs dotted the premise in heavy, stone vases.

"The lights are out," I said, as Luke and I walked side by side up the front lawn. Not only were the lights out, but there was no sound or movement coming from the house. "This is a rowdy party."

"You questioning this? Bold move coming from you, Ripley."

I knew I'm the last person to be criticizing Luke Dawson's social events, but this is a low bar. I expect somepeople at a party. I mean, I'm the girl who shows up to a party in a turtle neck.

We rang the doorbell.

A silver haired lady opened the door. She was wearing stockings and a tartan frock. Classical music was faintly trickling in through the living room.

"We must be at the wrong house," I told Luke.

"Hi Gloria, lovely to see you," he greeted the old lady, "We're here for the party."

"Of course you are, Lukey! Look at you! I can tell you're eating your green beans and getting strong like Popeye."

"Popeye eats spinach," I said. Not sure why I said it.

"Please take your shoes o dear. I didn't catch your name," she pointed at the welcome mat.

While she turned around and shu led o , I glared at Luke, "Is this a joke? You said it was a party for seniors, not senior citizens."

"Gloria," Luke said, ignoring me as usual, as the old lady came back with little tea sandwiches, "Millie doesn't think this is fun."

I pinched him.

Though there wasn't much to pinch. This boy is made of muscle.

"Jumping Jiminey!!! You kids have such high expectations these days," she was about to say more, but her kitchen timer dinged. "The quiche is ready!" she put the plate of tea sandwiches down next to us and hurried o into the kitchen.

"Let's go," Luke took my hand and led me down the corridor.

I stared at our entwined hands. My hand fit so ly in his and his fingers wrapped securely around mine. Warm.

"That was Austin's nanny."

"He's seventeen and he still has a nanny?" I asked.

"Gloria's a legend," he said, barely noticing how we were walking.

Did it really feel that natural to be holding my hand? I stared up at him, lost in this moment as he continued to say something. It was just sounds at that point.

And then, we stopped at a white cupboard.

He let go of me and pointed inside. "Welcome to the party."

"Have you lost your mind?"