

he said.

Millie."

me.

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The sun is gone but I have a light ~ Kurt Cobain The night is always so dark. I saw the violence that burst out of it and the mess it le in its wake. Paramedics were li ing Austin into an ambulance, setting him alongside Christopher's injured friend. Chad's car was dented, scratched and had a smashed window. He sat on the cement pavement, leaning against the wheel of his car while his hand bled on his lap. Luke held me in his arms even though he was injured himself. He kissed me and made sure I was alright. I was alright. We were all going to be alright. Then, Luke and I separated to see to our friends. I went towards the ambulance. Chris was trying to push past the paramedics to join his friend inside. "There's no space for you to accompany him. You can see him in the hospital," they told Chris, before they tried pinning him down to ten to his own wounds. a<sup>1</sup> "Austin," I called into the ambulence, "We're here for you. Do you hear me?" **a** "You're shouting, Millie, so yes we all hear you," Austin responded from his stretcher. His humor had not gone anywhere. "How do you feel?" I called out, not lowering my voice at all. a **3**53 "This is VIP transportation so I'm good." I smiled but cast a worried glance in Chad's direction. Luke was crouching beside Chad now, helping him get up. Chad put his weak arm over Luke's shoulder and leant his full weight. Luke heaved him up and they walked towards us. a<sup>6</sup> My gaze so ened watching them. a In my short time with Luke, I have seen the power of friendship. His friends go through fire for each other, witheach other. They stay true in a way I haven't experienced before. **A30** In the thick of the fight, Chad and Luke had protected each other when the gang turned on them for my necklace. I remember seeing that. My silly necklace. It wasn't worth all this. <del>12</del>0 The silver necklace sat in my pocket and I felt it like a heavy weight on me. I felt partly to blame for what happened tonight. Chad sat down as a paramedic came to tend to him. He shi ed his weight o Luke's shoulder and Luke stumbled. He was wounded and carrying Chad had exerted a lot of physical pressure on him. I ran to help Luke, but the paramedics were already beside him. ď They criticized him for injuring himself further and sent him to sit with Chris. đ "You're all under eighteen so we will be calling your legal guardians as soon as we arrive at the hospital," the paramedic said, "The police will also be there to take your statements. Now, no one is in a critical condition. So, you can stop helping each other and focus on <del>4</del>76 yourselves." The gambler's bike gang stayed at a distance from the paramedics. They had helped in the fight but didn't want to go much further. a Their leader came up to me, now, and said, "A comedic muse who's always one step away from catastrophe." <del>4</del>75 "It tends to pan out that way when we meet, doesn't it?" I remarked, "I may be your muse, but you may be my bad omen." a\* He laughed, "I've been called that before." á<sup>7</sup> My eyes gravitated to Luke. I felt comforted by the sight of him. Hearing his deep voice calmed me and seeing his captivating presence revitalized me. He was in a deep conversation with Chris. The gambler saw where my eyes were drawn to. "That boy is trouble," I nodded. Luke was dramatic, energetic, charismatic, sarcastic - all 332 a the ics - and I had the biggest crush on him. "But he needs a girl like you. If I'd been that lucky, my life would've taken a very di erent turn." Almost as if Luke could hear us, he turned towards me. His blue eyes melted mine, in the way they always have. He and Chris exchanged a one arm hug and then Luke came towards us, limping slightly. ä "I don't like you kid," the gambler announced as Luke approached us, "Because you remind me of me." "You remind me of my bad bets," Luke answered, "But thank you for getting involved tonight. I'm sure you did it for her, more than for me but thanks." ð "You bet I didn't do it for you, but you should be proud of yourself kid. You were unarmed and outnumbered, and you took those guys on." 37 Luke didn't take compliments easily, and he put the attention back on me, "Can you take Minnie home? I don't want her to stay up at the hospital with us. They're going to call our parents and she doesn't need that kind of trouble." a<sup>8</sup> Luke wasn't looking at me since he knew how I would react. I immediately disagreed, "No, I want to-" a "I'm with the boy on this one," the gambler said, and told us both, "I'll leave you two to say your goodbyes and then I'll take you home **3**41 He le without waiting for us to respond. He spoke to his men and stood by his motorbike. a <del>4</del>2 I stared angrily at Luke, "I want to come with you." "I know, and I don't want to be away from you," he answered, taking my hand, "I want to stand by your side but not if you have to stand in my mess." I reluctantly accepted his argument and moved on to a question that had been on my mind since he walked up to us, "Luke, what did you say to Chris?" a Truthfully, I had been surprised to find Chris fighting alongside Luke. They were supposedly rivals. a "I told him that, a er tonight, I have his back. He had mine." They were on opposite teams on court, but maybe not o court anymore. Both hyper competitive and facing similar challenges in the same sport; it could be the start of a strong friendship. å My junior year had begun with a bang. Maybe this year wouldn't turn a<sup>8</sup> out so badly a er all. My relationship with my mother was on the mend, now that I returned her necklace. Flora was still dealing with her breakup by asking me if Luke could invite her out everywhere. a<sup>5</sup> What else? a Mr Dawson still regarded me with distrust whenever he saw me. å<sup>5</sup> I still had no clue who was writing the mystery letters to blackmail **461** I was back on the mathlete team, enjoying my a er-school work shi s at Lola Rae. ď And my previously broken heart was full again. More full than I thought possible. a⁴ As for Julia, I cancelled my subscription to her issues. a I parked my beat-up car outside Austin's house. He was spending the weekend in bed, a er being released from the hospital. ď I held a bouquet of flowers in my hand. I'd picked them out of Mrs Dawson's backyard for him. I knew she wouldn't be pleased with me, but what's new? A71 \*Luke's perspective\* a "Photo time," Gloria said as she shoved the boys closer together. a<sup>1</sup> Chad grinned with his pu y black eye. Luke leaned on a crutch and Austin wore an arm brace. The three amigos stood for the photo in Austin's living room. **360** Apple cider was being heated on the kitchen stove, which Austin had spiked with brandy when Gloria wasn't looking. a<sup>43</sup> She had control of the TV that was playing Casablancan the background. Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman's voices mixed into the background. đ It was a chilly autumn day. Austin's parents were not at home this weekend and the boys were keeping him company while he recovered. ď Millie arrived at the doorstep and rang the doorbell. Gloria went over to open it. a "Hello dearie," Gloria enveloped her in a bear hug, "Welcome home! I've got some apple cider brewing that will be a real treat. And we'll redo our photo now that you're here." \*Millie's POV\* a Coming out of Gloria's bear hug, I felt the warmth of the fireplace and the smell of Gloria's home cooking. Another black-and-white movie was playing on the TV. đ And she called it home. It's the first time I've ever been somewhere that welcomed me 'home.' a⁴ The boys came to the door to see me, and their eyes traveled from my face down to my... flowers. <del>a</del>2 "Are you picking Luke up for your date?" Austin asked, "With flowers?" "What's happening?" Luke looked astonished. "Are we crashing your date right now?" Chad questioned. a<sup>7</sup> Then Luke stepped forward to talk to me privately, "I was going to pick you up at your house. I have our whole date planned." a<sup>6</sup> He was standing close to me, holding my arm so ly and I hit him with the flowers. "These aren't for you. I came to check on Austin." 314 "Well then! Don't smash my gi on him!" Austin said, reaching for the flowers with his one good hand. **846** As the gi exchanged hands, Luke stared down at the freshly plucked bouquet, "Are those from my gar.... Never mind." Without the others seeing, he raised a suspicious eyebrow at me. He'd recognized them from his backyard. I shrugged meekly back. ď The apple cider was taken o the stove and poured into five glasses. Gloria added cinnamon sticks and placed them on a tray. Like moths to a flame, Chad and Austin gravitated to the kitchen. å ď Luke's hand rested on my elbow and he pulled me back. I felt myself touch his chest as I stepped back, and his warm body enveloped me. The butterflies in my stomach started to flutter again as my nervousness for our date returned. ď "There's nothing to be nervous about, Minnie," he whispered into my ear as he felt my body tense under his touch. "It's our first date. I want it to be the first of many." I gulped. I hadn't expected that he would be here when I arrived, so I was now thinking of all the things I should've done: perfume, breath mints, nicer outfit. ď "We're meant to go in an hour, but why don't we cut to the chase now?" he suggested. <del>a</del> He waited for my response. I couldn't turn to face him just yet – my stomach was only starting to calm down before it started freaking out again – but he saw my head nod. a I'd be crazy not to. "Hey, we're heading out," Luke called out to the kitchen. He put his coat on and walked towards the door. a It was surprising how quick he was; how ready he was for our date. Chad, Austin and Gloria came out to watch us. a "You won't stay for snacks?" Gloria asked us, making me really hesitate. **₫**5 As wonderful as Luke is, I do like my snacks. Luke pulled the front door open and replied, "Minnie and I have a date that's three months overdue." Three months overdue. Is he saying he-"Minnie?" Chad repeated. Luke had accidentally called me by my nickname in front of them. "Her real name's Minnie? Is everything a a™ "BYEEEE!" Austin yelled from his door, waving a handkerchief he must have stolen from Gloria. He dabbed the handkerchief against his nonexistent tears, "They grow up so quickly." Luke and I walked down Austin's front lawn, towards the cars parked on the side of the street. He took longer than usual, using a crutch for his injured leg. a<sup>4</sup> There were some minor logistical issues around getting to our mystery date location. We had both driven to Austin's house. Ywo 351 a cars and one date... "We're taking my car," Luke decided, pulling his keys out of his a "But I'm the better driver," I argued. Remember to never forget the-"That's extremely debatable," he disagreed, "And I know where we're going," he said as the winning point. a<sup>2</sup> I reluctantly got into the passenger seat. We all knew I was the better driver, but he had the better car. I nestled into a comfortable position. This was a familiar spot, sitting in the passenger seat of Luke Dawson's car while he drove out. He gave me control of the stereo, handing me the AUX cable. ď I like that we share similar tastes in music. Music was one of the first ways we connected on the camping trip this summer. A er the other counselors had rejected me by the bonfire, Luke came to join me. He ate my sandwiches and we sat side-by-side, listening to my playlist. 304 I glanced over at him now. The boy who had been there for me in more ways than I could remember. He felt my eyes on him and glanced back. Our eyes locked. Suddenly, music came bursting out of the stereo: Magic Mike – Pony 495 A half-naked Channing Tatum and his Chippendale crew was the image that came into our minds.... å That base hit embarrassment deeper inside of me with each note. ã<sup>6</sup> Any romantic moment immediately shattered. I could cringe until my pension kicks in and it still wouldn't be enough. a<sup>7</sup> Luke swerved the car, and the phone fell out of my lap as I tried to stop the song. I only managed to turn the magic – I mean music- up. 39 "I see where your mind's at," he smirked, having lost control of the car a er being so distracted. Right when he said that, a text came through on my phone: a I changed my mind about backing o . I'm in NYC for the next two weeks but when I come back I want you to get to know melake **а**7к "Okayy. That's a message we'll bring up later," I mumbled to myself as I quickly dismissed Jake's text. ä A problem for another day. <del>4</del><sup>6</sup> Along with the blackmailer. This morning I had woken up to a bowl of cornflakes and a side of blackmail. Another letter had been slipped a<sup>3</sup> under my front door. It said: YoU have ignored My Every warning. NoW come consequences. tHe NeCkLaCe WaS jUsT tHe BeGiNnInG. ak My next pitstop a er stopping by Austin's home this morning, was the police. Only now, I was with Luke. a "Hey Luke, do you think we can stop by the police station first?" I a<sup>3</sup> "Can't wait until a er our date?" he asked back, "I know sh\*t seems to follow us around, but let's try putting everything on pause. For one a ernoon, let's enjoy us." "You're right," I agreed, saying quietly, "This is something I've really look forward to." đ "Me too," he smiled so ly, "I haven't been so excited for a date in... "A GARDEN GNOME!" I yelled, tapping my finger against the glass. My face pressed against the window and I pointed at the receding garden gnome on the side of the road. a<sup>7</sup> "LUKE! There's a garden gnome on the street!" "Ok, ok," he said, slowing the car down. He muttered, "We wouldstop for a garden gnome." Before the car had come to a full stop, I threw my seat belt o in the most dramatic of fashions and hopped out of the car. Yes, hopped. ď "Gnomey!" I yelled, running towards it. This gnome had the exact same yellow hat that my one had. I ran towards it and picked it up from the side of the road, swinging it in my arms, "This looks exactly like my gnome!" a I stared back at Luke, who was failing to react with as much excitement. He took his time getting out of the car. a I searched for any identifier, anything to suggest where it had come from. A folded note slipped out of its clay hand. Confused, I opened å Good things come to gnomes who wait. I looked up. "Luke, did you write this?" I recognized the chicken scratch handwriting. Luke's chicken scratch is what confused the camp counselors this summer when they thought we lived in the same house and could therefore live in the same cabin. a<sup>7</sup> I'd never forget that handwriting. đ Holding gnomey in my arms, I turned to face him. "Was this meant to be here? Did you plant this?" ā<sup>4</sup> He didn't respond. He stood still a few yards away from me with his blue eyes smoldering into an ocean of colors. ď And that's when I saw a furry animal in the grass beside his feet. I **a**3 pointed at it. He didn't move and it didn't move. I walked towards the creature and realized it was a stu ed animal. ď A lemur, to be precise. I picked it up and read the note hanging o its tail: You can't rush something you want to last. å <del>248</del> The zen lemur. Before I could react, I spotted another animal a little further ahead. I ran towards it, knowing already that it was a stu ed animal Luke had planted. a A raccoon. I plucked it out of the grass and read the note: You may be the world's worst driver, but you know how to drive me crazy. The emotions were bubbling inside of me. The memories of the zen lemur, the raccoon... everything we had been through together. How it was all just the beginning. How well he knew me... It was becoming too much. I saw another object that didn't fit into the natural landscape. A basketball. <del>a</del> A message had been written in black marker on the side of the ball: We were playing basketball when we kissed, and you agreed to a date so I wouldn't miss It's true. He remembered it all. a\* Next to the basketball, was a broken laptop. The same laptop I ran over in my car on that very first day. 370 A note was taped to the broken screen: I realized too late that I owed you for changing my perspective. The words had escaped my mouth. His had been eloquently written in these beautiful messages and mine were breaths of air. Breathless. af He'd planted these messages all across the pasture, with the expectation that I would get here. Eventually. a "Where did you get all of these things?" I asked, my mind reeling at how sentimental this gesture was. å The emotion was weighing my voice down. I didn't know what to say. No one had ever done this for me. đ "The basketball and laptop I already had," he answered, walking towards me, "Everything else I got from the store near Alpine last night. Chad was helping me before we got ambushed." af7

lie?"

pocket.

Dawson

asked.

ever."

it.

I nodded; no further questions. My lips curled into a smile. The shock

Luke came towards me, slowly because he was still injured, and when

"I want you to know how much you mean to me, Millie. How every

never told you why I went to camp this summer. I hit a ceiling in basketball. My game was su ering, and I wasn't a team player."

I tried to hide my smile at that. With his ego, he definitely was not.

"I've been a basketball player since I was five years old. My father pushed it on me. He made me train every day until I was the best. It

took a lot of sacrifice, not only by me but by my entire family. Our weekends revolved around my practice schedule and I learnt how to

He took a moment to breathe. He picked up his basketball and turned it in his hands, in disgust, "But sometimes I question it. Am I anything

Now he looked at me. He looked at me as if he expected me to understand what on earth he was going through. How could I?

"My whole life people have told me I'm useless," I finally said, "No one put me first and no one expects me to do well. But I don't know if

I've become anything either. Opposites attract, right?" I laughed

"You're far from nothing," he said with such strength in his voice,

We both smiled at that. The wind rustled the bare branches of the

that until now. Somehow, I was always comfortable with you."

"I loved that," Luke confessed, "And I loved watching how your

confidence grew. You faced the school down, a gang, my friends and

I shook my head, hoping he wouldn't notice the emotion in the tears

I stared at the strong, handsome boy in front of me. So many people had walked away from me. So many people had never bothered to get to know me. How is it possible that the one person who did was

"Luke," I gasped, suddenly realizing where we were. "I know where

His arms were wrapped around my waist and my hands were on his chest. He smiled, his stunning smile that revealed perfect white teeth, and leaned his head down over my mouth. He didn't stifle my words,

"Yes, you do, Minnie," he whispered, "It's to the place we met. I'm

Every story has a beginning. Mine had two - I started this once a while ago and then rewrote the story from scratch. I want you all

to know, that your comments have made me laugh and smile.

day, I would feel like this was worth it.

expression. Every thing has a beginning.

If this story could give one ounce of the support I felt from you, I would feel good about it. Even if it made you smile just once one

May we all continue to support each other and encourage creative

As an o icial announcement, THERE WILL BE A SEQUEL. The rest of Millie and Luke's date... whether they get their happy ever

Thank you for an incredible ride. And if you wish to join for some more Luke/Millie/Austin vibes and some real life shenanigans, my

P.S. Happy birthday to the 2 readers who mentioned that today

EDIT - SEQUEL IS OUT NOW. IT'S CALLED PLAY NO MORE AND IS

a er... the Jake drama... the blackmail mystery.... I'll keep

everyone updated about via instagram (username:

that clouded my eyes. "If I'm strong, it's only because I've been

The friend I never asked for, but the one I always needed.

but he let his lips hover over mine, enjoying the moment.

"No," I smiled mischievously, "The beginning started with a

you're taking me now! I recognize the road."

taking you back to the beginning."

"You were the first person I could stand up to," I said, "I never realized

"When I first met you, Millie, you hid your beauty from the world. You had sadness in your eyes and the only emotion I saw in you was when

I always seek humor in the sadder moments.

think only about myself and my future."

without this sport?"

you were yelling at me."

trees around us. But I felt warm.

even your own. You're strong, Millie."

quietly.

weak."

Luke Dawson?

raccoon."

The End

**Last Author's Note** 

NatalieInACorner).

Love and laugh, **BabyInACorner** 

was their special day

insta handle is NatalieInACorner.

ON MY WATTPAD PROFILE ALREADY

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moment with you has changed me," he said, taking my hand in his, "I

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had melted into happiness. I couldn't be any happier.

he took me into his arms, I couldn't have felt any safer.