

Broken | 3: The Joint

“What?” I grumble, opening my eyes to see a man standing over me.

Instinct takes over and I spring up and punch him in the stomach.

Mason lets out an *oof* and falls onto my bed clutching his midsection.

“Damn, Lily,” he laughs, “you pack a wallop. I might have a bruise.”

“Serves you right! Breaking and entering.”

“No breaking—your hide-y key is very easy to find.”

I shake my hand out and say, “What are your abs made of? Concrete?”

I collapse back onto my pillow and close my eyes.

“I’m going back to sleep.”

“You’re running with me.”

“What time is it?”

“5:45 a.m. Told you I was serious.”

“I changed my mind.”

“Too bad!” he says as he yanks the blanket off me.

I clutch at it, but he’s too strong and pulls it out of my hands.

“Hey! I could’ve been naked under there!” I snap.

“But you aren’t. You’re wearing a very cute pajama set.”

His eyes linger on my matching tank top and boy-short set with a cartoon cherry pattern.

“How’d you know that cherries are my favorite fruit?”

He stares a beat longer and the hunger in his eyes makes my stomach flip.

He turns and walks out, saying, “Dressed and outside in three minutes.”

I huff and grumble to myself as I change.

Who the hell gets up this early during summer vacation? Psychopaths. That's who.

"Why are you making me go running this early?" I groan as I step outside.

"You said you wanted to be able to run the whole thing. I'm just here to help," Mason says, way too chipper for being up before the sun.

"Besides, there are fewer people around."

He shrugs.

Right. If anyone from either of our schools saw us together, our social lives would be doomed.

Mason drives us to the trail in his car, and I enjoy not being the one driving for once.

Olly has his license but always refused to drive anywhere.

"You ready?" Mason asks with a smirk as we get to the start of the trail.

"No," I groan, exhausted before we've even started.

"Perk up, princess, it's not that early," he laughs before taking off in a jog.

I quickly catch up with him despite my protests.

Just over halfway through I run out of steam and slow down to a walk.

Mason slows down too.

"I feel like I'm going to die," I groan.

"You're not going to die."

He laughs at me.

"Where's that peppy cheer spirit?"

He waves pretend pom poms in the air like he's cheering me on.

"It's dead and buried in the backyard," I huff, making him laugh again.

I can't help but laugh with him.

And somehow, I find the energy to keep going.

Just as we're about to enter the parking lot, I spot Oliver's car pulling in.

I grab Mason's arm and yank him into some bushes off the trail.

"What the—" he starts to protest, but I shush him with a finger to his lips.

I point and we peek through the leaves.

Harry and Oliver are getting out of the car and walking toward the trail.

"If they see us together, I'm toast," I whisper.

"Sure you don't want to make him jealous? We could walk out holding hands," Mason grins.

"You want to get your ass beat today? They're dying for revenge."

"I'll take my chances," Mason says and starts to stand, but I grab his arm and tug him back down.

"Please don't."

He hesitates—I can see the fire in his green eyes.

He's okay with fighting these two.

Maybe wants to.

But then his look goes soft.

He nods and settles back down to the ground next to me.

As they pass, we hear a little snippet of their conversation.

"Yeah, dude, she's gone totally psycho," Olly says. "Won't stop texting me."

"Really," Harry asks skeptically, god bless him.

I want to stand up and yell THAT'S BULLSHIT.

Mason senses me tensing up and gives my hand a gentle squeeze.

Oliver and Harry's voices fade as they head further down the trail.

Mason and I stay frozen, listening to their footsteps until they round a corner.

I didn't realize it, but I've been holding my breath.

I let it out in a loud whoosh.

He doesn't move, just looks at me, still holding my hand.

I realize how close together we are.

I can smell his body, sweaty with a hint of faint cologne.

My cheeks flush, and I bite my lip.

I suddenly feel so awkward.

To lighten the mood, I force a laugh.

"Hope there's no poison ivy here!" I blurt out awkwardly as I stand up, brushing leaves off my shorts.

God, I'm so cringe sometimes.

After lunch, I go to meet up with Ava and Harry at the ice cream parlor in town.

"Where the hell were you last night?" Ava yells at me the second I walk through the door.

"Hello to you too," I mumble, joining my friends at their table.

"I came around and you weren't here," she says, folding her arms over her chest.

"I just went out to clear my head," I lie. "Sorry I didn't text you."

"Fine, I forgive you," she huffs. "But ice cream's on you today."

"Lily's the one who just went through a big breakup," Harry scolds her gently.

"We should be buying her ice cream. Whole pints if she wants."

Gentleman that he is, Harry takes our orders and goes to the counter to pay.

When he comes back with our sundaes, Ava digs in excitedly and exclaims, "I can't wait for school to start, you guys!"

"Ew. Why?" Harry asks, screwing his face up.

“Because we’re seniors!” she says with an eye roll.

“I can’t wait for school to be over,” I mutter, making Harry laugh.

“I seriously wonder why I’m friends with you two sometimes.” Ava sighs dramatically.

“Because we’re awesome,” he replies in a “duh” tone. “By the way—I have a date tonight.”

“Oh my god, who with?” I ask, holding in my squeal.

“Jonah.”

“That’s amazing! You have to tell me everything!” I say, letting the squeal out.

“Sure, babe.”

He laughs and wraps his arm around my shoulders.

My phone vibrates in my pocket.

I’m dying to check, but don’t want to do it in front of them.

“Babe, your phone’s buzzed like three times,” he says, nudging me.

“Huh?” I frown, pulling my phone out of my pocket and pretending to be surprised to have messages.

They’re all from Mason.

“Who’s M?” he asks, peering at my phone.

“No one,” I answer quickly, placing my phone facedown on the table as it vibrates again.

“Must be important,” he singsongs as Ava tries to grab my phone.

I quickly snatch it before she can. “Just answer them, babe,” Harry smirks.

M

What food do you like to eat? Other than pizza

M

I mean like snacks