

## 12 | Honey

**Hilarious poster by @j.rhianna.j... the raccoon, the baby in a corner... the cabin guide... it's all too much! Thank you!**

### Chapter 12: Honey

Today was the day. I covered myself with bug spray. I put extra sunscreen on my nose and ate oatmeal for breakfast.

I was ready.

My water bottle was full of ice coffee and fanny pack had flashlight, compass and lip balm in it.

"Howdie," I greeted Luke with extra enthusiasm.

Unlike me, he'd just woken up.

He was making breakfast in a zip up hoodie and gray sweatpants. He turned around, rubbing his eye, "Hey."

I tried hard not to stare. His hoodie was unzipped and the movement shielded the shadow over the hard lines of his muscular chest.

His hand dropped, and blue eyes widened. He stared at me. I was dressed in head-to-toe camo.

"It's too early for this."

I ignored him, and proudly adjusted the strap around my green safari hat. Nothing he could say would ruin my mood.

He muttered something about Crocodile Dundee in his kitchen and then, suddenly, the campers started screaming. I ran over to their room and found them racing in circles, jumping on the beds.

"MOUSE! MOUSE!"

"Guys, please, it's ok, we can handle this..." I tried to calm them down but none of them were listening. The kids continued to scream at the top of their lungs and it was impossible to catch any of them as they ran away from some mouse that was more terrified than they were.

"It's just a small mouse. Please, everyone, no, can we all just--"

The screaming was deafening. Malik almost knocked me over as he whizzed past, performing parkour on every piece of furniture we had. I had totally lost control of the group.

"Please--" I begged them, "Everyone please calm down."

And for the first time since we got here, Luke stepped into the camper's room.

He called out, "Next one to squeal will sleep on the floor with the mice tonight."

There was immediate silence.

His threat worked.

Coming from him, they all believed it.

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Luke got the kids to file single line out of the cabin, with their little backpacks on. He called them by number, from 1 to 10, since he didn't know any of their names. For whatever crazy reason, they enjoyed it.

It was like a game to them.

And Luke knew how to play games ;)

So, I guess this was just another thing he was better than me at doing. He'd spent all week ignoring them and now, with only one minute of his attention, they listened to him more than me. I don't get the world sometimes.

I sighed and looked around our cabin. It felt empty with all the kids gone. There was a stillness, a calmness, that made me miss the crazy atmosphere we'd created here. Who would ever have thought that Luke and I could take care of ten little humans?

I turned the lights off and picked up my backpack.

Sort of. I struggled.

It weighed a ton.

A literal ton.

I clipped the strap around my stomach and heaved myself up. I had to lean against the wall for support and then pushed myself off. I walked a few clumsy steps on the grass, but my back was killing me. This bag was so heavy.

"Luke."

He was walking ahead of me, his own camping bag swung over one shoulder. He made it look so easy.

"Luke!" I called out again, louder.

He glanced over his shoulder while he continued walking. I unclipped my bag and it fell off my shoulders with a thud onto the grass.

Luke stopped and sighed, "You walked three steps and you're done?"

Why does he have to be so blunt?

"My bag's heavy. I can't do it," I answered, mulling my words since I was too embarrassed to say them.

Why couldn't I be stronger? Why does everyone else find sporty things natural?

He returned to me and threw his own bag beside mine. He did not look happy about having to deal with me. He lifted my bag up to see whether it was actually heavy. Then he ripped it open and Dupree's iPad slipped out.

"Why are you bringing this?" he asked before he saw the iron under it, "Are you kidding?"

"In case our clothes get wrinkled--"

He immediately tossed them onto the grass, along with a frying pan, jar of peanut butter, book, Alicia's teddy bear... his swearing was getting more colorful by the minute.

I didn't want to leave all these things on the grass, so I picked them up and took them back to the cabin. When I returned, I saw that Luke had swapped out heavy objects, like the tent, from my bag and added them to his.

By the time he was done, his bag weighed twice as much, and mine was incredibly light.

"Thank y--"

"Don't."

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I didn't like the idea of camping, but I hated the hike even more. Tamara was at the front of the line, looking impeccable in some expensive lululemon leggings and crop top. She kept the campers in high spirits and I was envious of her ability to do that.

I had fallen near the back of the line. It's hard to pay attention to the branches hitting me in the face and the random logs that trip me over. I applied another slab of sunscreen to my nose.

And then the string of my safari hat got caught in a branch. My head yanked back along with it and I tried to unhook the string, but it got further entwined. I tried to wriggle my bag off, but it was still clipped around my waist and my head was now caught in an awkward position.

"Help," I tried to say but everyone was further ahead, quickly disappearing deeper into the forest.

"Herp," I repeated, helplessly.

A bird sat on a branch overhead.

I tried to wriggle my way out for a few more minutes. It was tied too tightly around my neck that I couldn't just remove the hat from my head. I also wasn't exactly flexible with this massive camping bag on my back.

"Survival of the fittest would not be kind to you."

Guess who.

I couldn't turn my head to Luke, since I was stuck in this death trap – but I heard him. His distinct and memorable voice. Twigs snapped under his feet as he walked towards me. His bag slid off his shoulder and he reached out.

He came back for me? His strong hands wrapped around me as he moved me aside so that he could reach the branch. I breathed in his scent. My back was leaning against his chest and I felt his hard muscles like an ironing board behind me. He breathed slowly, and his chest moved with each breath.

"Relax your arms," he said gently, as I watched him undo the knot.

It took a few seconds and I was staring at his fingers before, finally, the string released, and I was free. Before I could say anything, I felt Luke's hands tighten around my waist. I stared at him and opened my mouth to say something but his finger pressed against my lips to silence me.

My lips tingled at his touch. I stared into his blue eyes which were locked on something behind me. Slowly, slowly, I turned my head.

A bear.

There was a bear in the distance. A mother fricking bear.

I tensed up and pressed myself against Luke. His arms tightened around me and he pulled me back, a step at a time. Slowly.

"We're in such shi--"

"Ssh," he whispered, his eyes trained on the bear, "Stay quiet, Minnie."

"Millie."

"Now's not the time."

"I'm freaking out."

"Don't," he said, "We're f'cked if you do."

The grizzly bear was getting closer. He wasn't focused on us, but he was definitely heading in our direction. I've never seen a bear like this in real life. They're huge, with matted fur that made his movements deceptively bulky. Those animals can run fast.

I whispered, frozen in place, "Winnie the Pooh liked honey you know."

Luke tried to pull me back. "This isn't a cartoon."

"Seriously," I repeated, "Bears like honey."

"That's a fun fact," Luke said, barely paying attention to what I was saying.

"Do you think he can smell the honey in my bag?"

"The **what!**"

Oops.

Maybe I shouldn't have packed that.

**A/N: We all have those days. Those forgetful, I-packed-honey-on-a-camping-trip-kind-of-days, don't we? Let me know on Instagram @NatalieInACorner! I'd love to hear your experiences**

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