

13 | Blow the candles

Hey hey! I didn't expect this chapter to be up so quickly. But I came home at 4AM this morning and thought yolo. So this is the product of my midnight mind. Don't worry, I totally waited until a er I slept to edit grammar/syntax before posting. XOXO

Chapter 13: Blow the candles

I held on to Luke, my arms wrapped around his right arm. He peeled my hands o him and slowly, gently, rested his hands on the straps of my bag.

"You're a moving target," he whispered, slowly sliding the bag o my body.

My arms tingled as his fingers moved along them. The bag made a so landing on the grass. Luke took my hand in his and pulled me into his arms. We stared ahead at the giant bear, who was sni ing the earth, getting closer and closer towards us.

I had accidentally packed a pot of honey in my bag. Well, it wasn't accidental. It was very intentional, because everyone loves honey... but I didn't realize that everyone includes an 800lb bear.

My hands held onto him again. Luke's strong, protective arms could not shield us from a grizzly bear.

My mistake put us both in danger.

It's strange to think that Luke and I only met a week ago. I've been his neighbor my whole life, but we never really exchanged words until a week ago. I still question whether he knows my name. And yet here we are.

Luke's been in every girl's dreams and, here, right now he was holding me in his arms, just like a dream... except that the background was a nightmare. This was the worst possible scenario.

Dying in your arms tonight...

It's amazing how life-or-death situations really bring people together.

Morbid thoughts aside.

I don't even think he realizes how close we were standing. How romantic it looked. I saw the arrogant side of him disappear.

Normally, he considers me the most annoying kid he has to deal with – and yet here he is, protecting me.

I guess Luke Dawson isn't such a bad guy a er all.

Except that we were only united by the fear in front of us.

"There's a little mound behind that pine tree," he whispered in my ear, his hot breath on my skin, "Hide behind there. Move slowly."

I followed his lead. We were very careful to not make any big movements or sounds. I actively avoided every big twig on the floor.

Now was so not the time for my clumsiness.

We crouched behind the mound, our shoulders touching. I looked at him, at his perfect profile as he stared ahead. His eyes were monitoring the bear's every movement, focused.

I dared to speak. "I read somewhere that if we make a lot of noise and scream and make ourselves look big it'll scare the bear."

"Millie, if you make a sound louder than a whisper, I'll attack you myself."

"I'm just trying to help."

"We haven't talked about the f'cking pot of honey you decided to bring into a forest."

"Can we table that convo?" I asked politely.

I know I messed up.

The bear was on my bag now, sni ing inside and pawing at it. It was only a matter of time before my bag would turn into shreds.

My hands were clammy from nervousness. "This isn't meant to happen. It's so unlikely we'd run into a bear."

"Bears can't hear well but you need to keep your voice down."

I went quiet and stared down at my hands.

"Luke, you came back for me," I whispered.

He was the only one to have noticed when I needed help. Ironic that the guy who has all the attention actually pays attention to those of us in the shadows.

I added, "Thank you."

I was used to having no one see me.

I don't know if he heard me. If he did, he pretended not to.

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We arrived at the campsite an hour a er everyone else had got there. Luke immediately went to warn Mr Woodhouse about the bear encounter. I watched Mr Woodhouse freak out. The sun was already setting, and it was too late for us all to walk back.

My bag was gone. The bear had it. Thankfully, most of my stu was packed in Luke's bag. It was just my clothes that I had lost.

And my sleeping bag.

Awkward.

With Luke around, everyone wanted to play basketball. He was really good, as the endless trophies and school articles testified.

But considering that we were in a campsite in the middle of a forest, there were no basketball hoops and the terrain was grass. Someone had brought basketballs and they practiced throws.

That someone was Mr Woodhouse. He was like Luke's groupie. I watched him now, running around, catching random balls and chucking them against trees. The man could be a meme.

Meanwhile, Luke was calmly giving the campers' pointers and helping them with their technique. He demonstrated a couple throws while a large group of girls admired his form.

His form

You get me :)

Malik, the 8-year old energetic camper living in our cabin, was the most eager. He was getting bullied by the older boys but still wanted to play. I watched from the food section, where I was helping the sta make sandwiches for the campers.

"Millie, why don't you just give up this fake innocent act?" a girl appeared in front of me, obstructing my line of vision, "Your parents must have bribed Mr Woodhouse into putting you in a cabin with Luke. Don't think for a second that we don't see through that."

I found myself in front of three girls. They had come up to me from out of nowhere. Maybe they were bored and thought that hurting me would provide some sort of entertainment.

"Yeah," another one said, "I can't believe you were so stupid to expect that ploy would work. He's never going to pay any attention to you. You're an annoying weasel!"

A girl laughed, "Weasel! Yeah that's exactly what she looks like. Oh my god Stacey, what a good description!"

"Thank you. I just came up with that myself."

"I didn't do anything. We were put in the same cabin by accident," I tried to defend myself, "They thought we were related."

As soon as I said those words I realized I should've just kept my mouth shut.

"Related?!" They laughed, "You are the worst liar! No way a hottie like Luke is related to a nobody like you! Get over yourself! Seriously!"

"What is that lame apron you're wearing anyway?" Stacey stared at my apron that I put on to help make the sandwiches, "Let's see what my followers have to say about that."

Before I could move, she snapped an awful picture of me in the apron and posted it for her 2k followers to see. How do I know how many followers she has? Because a er they le , I immediately checked Instagram to see how bad the photo was.

It was bad.

And she created a poll saying: Liar or Loser.

I wonder how many people voted.

"How in the world do we even have cell service out here?" I muttered angrily to myself as I buttered another sandwich with extra mayo.

Damn cell service. Getting all that aggression out on the poor mayonnaise.

I couldn't believe they thought my parents bribed Mr Woodhouse to let me live with Luke Dawson. If anyone knew anything about my family, they would know that I don't exactly have one. My father bounced out of my life and my mother wishes she never had me. I'm not just saying that. On my 7, 8 and 9th birthdays, she told me that was her wish a er I blew out the candles on mine.

A er I finished the last of the sandwiches and wrapped the extra food up so that any stray bears wouldn't sni it out, I looked around. It was evening, and the campers were exchanging ghost stories around a campfire. I saw some of the counselors from my high school hanging around nearby. I took a plate of sandwiches with me, to bring as a gi .

"Can I join?" I asked.

Tamara looked at me and laughed, "Just because I have to see you when I'm with Luke, doesn't mean I want to. Do my eyes a favor and get out of this space."

I stared around at all the other camp counselors who stared back at me with blank faces. No one said anything.

I didn't argue. I took my sandwiches and went to a secluded part of the campsite, overlooking a creek. I put the plate of sandwiches next to me and sat by myself. I felt stupid for making those extra sandwiches. They didn't want me, and they definitely didn't want my sandwiches.

In the background I heard people calling Luke's name. People were always calling out for him.

I heard Tamara's voice chime loudly, "That roommate of yours is following you around like a lost puppy, Luke."

"Except that puppies are cute."

"You don't have better things to talk about?" Luke answered, "I do."

Wow, Luke, thanks for defending me. Not.

I stared out over the creek. I didn't expect anything from him. He was an arrogant guy that people praised, despite momentary flashes of kindness. I wasn't betting on his good side anytime soon. I've been around too much disappointment in my life to do that.

No one has ever stood up for me but that's fine. All I need is the strength to stand up for myself.

I put earphones on and played some music. I shu led a few songs and settled on rap, letting my mind be carried away by a heavy beat.

"You always this antisocial, Minnie?"

A/N: This chapter was so heartbreaking to write. We have good and bad days, but I strongly encourage reaching out to help others during their dark times. In a humble e ort to support each other, I've started posting anonymous 'confessions' on my Instagram that people want to share for advice, help etc. Please consider commenting on those posts to help fellow strangers&friends. It's on my Instagram

It's on @NatalieInACorner

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