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Chapter 50: No Interruption

The basketball court was draped in darkness. An eerie stillness filled the room, except for the athlete in center court. His muscular build was outlined by the darkness behind him. Every inch of his body was sculpted and toned.

I looked around the glimmering floor and at endless bleachers. I imagined how they were usually packed with cheering crowds and how the lights shone down on the game.

He was alone now. No fans, no spotlights.

Just him.

I watched him do figure-8 drills. He dribbled the ball through and around his legs, moving it from right to left as he went. He owned the court. He handled the ball like an extension of his own arm.

I stepped forward with a lot of hesitation. The sparkling floor squeaked under my shoes, while I kept my eyes trained on his moving form. The closer I got to him, the more I admired his energy, his speed, his strength.

The ball swished through the hoop without touching the rim. He went to pick it up when he glanced my way and-

Froze.

Luke stared at me like he couldn't believe I was more than a mirage.

And, slowly, he removed his headphones. "Millie?"

It was both a question and a statement. It's not one that I take Luke Dawson by surprise. I walked towards him, stepping over the large painted letters of POHS (Preston Oakes High School).

"What are you doing here?" he asked me, stopping the ball from rolling away with the heel of his foot. "How did you get in?"

"The doors were unlocked," I said.

It wasn't Mission Impossible.

"I'm happy you're here," he responded, "And surprised. We've been a while, probably something I've said."

"I didn't come here to talk about that," I admitted, feeling guilty that I was about to bring Jake's name up. Luke was looking so hopeful. "I came to let you know that I accepted the date with Jake. I wanted you to hear it from me first."

Luke sighed. He threw his headphones onto the towel draped over one of the bleachers and ran a hand through his hair.

"I'm not going to talk about that until we talk about us," he said.

"Us?"

Just saying. I had me feeling some type of way.

"Why are you mad at me?" he asked.

Sweat glistened on his smooth skin and his bright eyes shone against the darkness of the room. He looked hurt. Again. I couldn't believe I could be the one to hurt him.

"Don't you get it?" I asked, my own pain coming through. He'd hurt me too.

And I'd been trying to keep it in but couldn't anymore. "We had something that was obviously more than friends. But then you're rude to me when I'm invited to your home and you go on sleeping with other girls. Jamie came over to your place the night I was there for dinner."

The words rested heavy in the air between us. It's true we never got together, but how could we if I couldn't trust him?

I didn't expect his reaction.

He closed his eyes. I looked at his tranquil face as he breathed out, "That's why you've been distant around me."

He said it in a way that sounded relieved. Like there was more to the story.

"What do you mean?"

He sat on the court, knees raised. With one hand, he absentmindedly dribbled the ball as he waited for me to join. I did so and my sneakers squeaked against the shiny floor. I crossed my legs and he reached out for my hand. I didn't give it.

"I didn't want to cause you pain," Luke confessed, "Jamie's father set us up on a date before summer. She's a nice girl and I wasn't going to lead her on, but she and I aren't a fit."

I didn't want to hear the love story of Luke Dawson and his basketball coach's daughter. I couldn't believe that coach set Luke up with his own kid?!

"I explained that to her and she walked in on you and me at Austin's party. She's a reasonable girl and said she wouldn't tell anyone. Her dad would take it out on me during practice."

"This story has so many moral issues with it, I can't," I said.

"Will you let me finish?" he cracked a smile, "I know you're dying to give some hard ass commentary, but give me a sec."

"OK," I nodded, "You have a sec."

"Two," he smirked. "Jamie's a friend of mine. She has my back. We've known each other since we were kids. I used to go over to her place for dinner when coach would run me over some plays."

"Again, I-"

He took his phone out of his pocket and scrolled through his messages. The screen lit his face in a pale blue hue.

"Now I know you won't believe the next part so I'm going to show you," he said, before landing on a text and then handing the phone over.

I took his black phone in my hand and read the message from Jamie Griffith: Hey captain, I have to confess something to you. It's about Millie. Can I come over?

Luke: Millie's at my place for dinner. Want to say it to her?

Jamie: Please no, I've made a mistake and I don't want her to hate me for it. But I need to tell you.

Luke: K.

Jamie: Thanks! I know you don't like drama so I'm sorry for this.

Luke hadn't responded to that message and they hadn't exchanged any messages since. My heart dropped in my stomach.

"Are you OK?" Luke asked me, reaching out for my hand a second time.

Again, I didn't offer my hand back. I stared down at the phone and my first reaction was-

"She calls you captain?"

I didn't hear what Luke said, since I was busy running scenarios in my mind. Underneath that question, my mind was whirling. So, Jamie didn't come over to sleep with Luke that night. In fact, they haven't been a thing since... before summer. And there was some more drama concerning me.

Great - when one question answers itself, another one opens: Jamie question closed. The 'what did she do to me' question open.

And I felt guilty. I jumped to conclusions about Luke. I expected the worst... when he only expects the best from me.

"She and Bianca were concocting some plan to embarrass you, but I've already spoken to Bianca and it's taken care of," he said as if he could read my mind, "Nothing's going to happen to you. The girls are backing off."

I itched my nose. Honestly, I was over this. I didn't ask him what they were planning because I wasn't into it.

Luke leaned towards me and I noticed my chin so he could see my eyes, "I would never do that to you, Millie."

I smiled, feeling his soft and warm touch on my skin.

The seconds passed by and not a sound pierced the silence in the basketball court. We were isolated from the world.

Finally, I sighed, "What is it about you that drives girls crazy?"

He laughed and waved the question away. He stood up, extended his hand and I finally took it.

"No seriously," I said, as he pulled me to my feet, "They turn into demons."

He replied, "I want you to be crazy about me."

He said those words like they were no big deal. Like he'd been thinking it for a while now. And not like they'd create flutters in my chest and below.

I didn't come here for this. "Luke."

"Millie, please don't say those words," he begged me, "Not tonight. I know I've done some things that you don't approve of, but I've never done anything against you. I was an asshole when I met you and I regret that. I can't lose you now."

He looked down, unable to face me properly. I didn't understand.

"You see me for me," he spoke quietly, "You believe in me."

"Luke, our whole town believes in you. Everyone adores you."

"No," he shook his head, "They're focused on the superficial things. None of that matters. You believe that I can be a good person. A better person than my father was. I remember every time you put me in my place, and I thank you for it."

"You don't have to thank me," I whispered.

Luke has done more for me this semester than anyone I could have ever dreamt of. Of all people in this school, how can the handsome athlete be the one to take care of a nobody? He gave me a lot of bullshit along the way, but ultimately, he was there for me.

How did someone like me and someone like him ever connect this way?

"I want you to know that I'm telling the truth," he continued, "When you asked me why I never invited you home before, I lied. The truth is I didn't want you to meet my family because I'm scared you'll see a part of me you don't like. My family..."

"I won't think of your family. I know they love you, but you are your own person with your own destiny. And I know you"

He nodded, but he didn't say anymore. I didn't want to pry into his family life. All I knew is what Jake had told me; that Mr Dawson was married to his mother before he cheated on her. Both women became pregnant and Mr Dawson left Jake's mother for the other woman... Luke's mother.

"Are you going to give me a sign?" he asked, his eyes lighting up an electric blue.

I saw specks of gray darting in his eyes, dancing across them. His mischievous nature was back.

"What do you mean a sign?" I laughed.

"A sign that you like me," he answered simply, "You're like a statue, Millie. I can't read you."

Oh wow

His smile broadened and my lips couldn't find the words to speak.

Stepping close to me, he whispered, "I know you get shivers every time I touch you."

His fingers lightly brushed my arm and, as if by reflex, sending shivers tingling through my spine.

Damn he must be smug about that.

"And I know how uncomfortable you get whenever I take my shirt off," he continued.

I gasped, "You're not going to-"

"Cool down Mills. We're not in a magic mike movie."

"Could've fooled me," I muttered. My cheeks were blushing, and I wanted to fan myself to cool down.

"Aside from our chemistry," he said, "I want to know if there's a deeper part of you that likes me."

"That's a really big question," I answered.

"OK," he accepted, "How about this? You miss a shot and you answer a question."

He raised a basketball in his left hand and casually twirled it in the air. I stared at him.

He threw the ball at me lightly, and I couldn't catch it. I fumbled and the ball went between my legs. I chased a er it and, when I finally returned with ball in hand, I said, "No, no. If I get the ball in, I'll answer a question."

AKA, neverbuddy.

"OK," he accepted the deal. "Three chances."

I threw the ball into the air and it went in a pathetic half circle, right into Luke's arms.

"Aim for the hoop, right? Not me," he clarified.

"Yeah, I know that," I said, embarrassed to admit that I was aiming for the hoop the whole time.

"Bend your knees," he coached me, "And form a 'c' shape with your shooting arm. Make sure your hand is under the ball, not to one side."

"Luke!"

With all this coaching, I might actually get the ball in. Which is not the goal.

I jumped and threw the ball. It soared through the air, much higher than I thought I could throw. Luke turned around, mouth wide, to watch it.

The ball bounced off the dashboard and onto the rim of the hoop.

It wobbled around.

The ball rolled off the rim.

And fell off.

Luke cursed and I laughed. "See! You shouldn't bet on me!"

"I always will," he responded and handed me the ball again.

This was my last chance. Luke clapped me on. I turned the ball in my hand until I felt comfortable with the grip. I raised it towards the hoop.

"OK, legs bent," I repeated his words, trying to concentrate.

"Arm higher," he said, walking towards me.

"Where do I aim?" I asked, my eyes focused on the towering hoop, even though Luke walking towards me was insanely distracting.

He was next to me now. His tall strong body standing next to me.

"Focus on the rim," he said.

How can I focus on anything?

I inhaled his musky scent and heard the deep undertone in his voice. Now that he was this close, I could see the sweat glistening on his smooth skin. He took my arm and raised it higher.

He adjusted my fingertips under the ball with his fingers. His hand trickled down my waist and he pressed down, so that my legs would bend more.

"Where are you going?" I whispered, feeling his body move behind me.

"Focus," he whispered, his strong hands resting on my waist.

Suddenly, I felt the weight of the floor under me disappear. Luke lifted me into the air and walked us towards the hoop. His strong arms wrapped around my waist as he lifted me higher. His movements were smooth and steady.

"Shoot," he said.

I did. There wasn't far I needed to aim. Luke had taken me so close and lifted me so high, that I reached out. I could touch the rim. The ball smoothly went into the net with a satisfying swish.

"Yes!!" I yelled out as Luke lowered me with equal energy.

I jumped into his arms and he wrapped them around me. "You did it!"

My head buried itself in his shoulder and felt the comforting warmth of his protection. I looked up at him and realized that his gaze was different...

Blue eyes that could melt me with his stare. Pink lips that were so soft to touch. Perfection. If there ever was such a thing.

The colors around him blurred. All I could see was Luke.

His face leaned towards mine. He held my gaze with a tenderness that filled my heart in anticipation. Trepidation. Bliss.

What about that question?

Our lips were close, teasingly close. He exhaled onto my lips and I shivered at the feeling. We had been so close before, but we had been interrupted. Twice before.

This time...

No interruption.

He brushed a strand of hair out of my eyes and kissed me.

The distance between our lips disappeared into a kiss that was passionate and tender. Luke's lips felt so soft and secure on my skin, like they belonged there. The sensations I felt before melted into one, just as I felt myself melt into him.

His smooth hands on my body tightened as he felt me weaken. I breathed in deeply, surprised by the sensation, and my lips parted. Our tongues touched. His hand rested on the side of my neck, and the tips of his fingers touched my face. He raised my chin gently towards him and deepened the kiss.

A/N: Please VOTE VOTE VOTE if you like the chapter!!!

It happened! The Kiss happened. I'm all out of words, so maybe you can supply me with some haha

Good, bad? Happy, sad?

Do you think they'll regret this?

What should Millie do about her upcoming date with Jake??

Follow me on Instagram (@NatalieinACorner) for all things Player Next Door and more. Oh look, that rhymed :)

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