

53 | Unforgettable

Chapter 53: Unforgettable

The next day began like any other. Preston Oakes High School waited for the sun to rise.

Posters hung across the walls, waiting for students to arrive. They were printed and pasted across lockers and slapped on the back of doors. Hundreds of copies of the same photo.

The image of Millie half-naked with a \$1 bill in her bra. Passed out for the whole school to see.

And under the picture were the words: \$1 Entry

People gaped, pointed and laughed about it. Many snapped photos and sent them on. The image went viral, both online and on school grounds. If people didn't know Millie before, she was infamous now.

Chad was the first of Luke's crew to arrive at school.

He was a morning person. His chef cooked him the same omelet every day before he drove his convertible to school. Now that he was here, he was confused. A photo was stuck to his locker. He thought it was fake at first. He didn't even realize that it was Millie.

He was in the middle of talking about it, when he recognized her. That's when he did a double take.

"Oh sh*t."

A few lockers down, Jake arrived at his spot. He was on his juul and almost choked on the smoke.

Usually, Chad and Jake barely interacted with each other, even though they were only a few lockers apart. But they looked at each other now. "Luke's going to."

And then the notorious man himself materialized.

Luke Dawson stormed the hallway, sending heart beats racing.

No one wanted to get in his way.

"WHO DID THIS?" he roared.

Jake took a poster down and stared at it, "Luke, relax. We'll find whoever did this."

"Don't f*cking tell me to relax."

"Yeah, don't tell him to relax," Austin said, accompanying him down the hall, "It's the least relaxing thing."

Luke did not pause as he passed by. Jake was the only person not squirming at the sight of angry Luke. He sighed and followed his brother, since Luke looked like he had a plan.

Chad slammed his locker shut and tagged along. Others stared and began to follow. Luke took a sharp right turn and arrived at the girls' lockers.

Bianca was applying red lipstick in a little mirror she kept in her locker. Oma noticed the boys coming and freaked out. She tapped her friend on the shoulder.

"Did you do this?" Luke confronted her.

Bianca almost messed up her lipstick. She shivered as she saw Luke's body approaching her in her compact mirror.

"No, I swear I didn't," she promised, turning to face him, lipstick in hand.

"We talked about this, Bianca."

"I know and I promised that I didn't do this. I swore to you back then that I wouldn't use the photo. Why would I even print them? That's so old school."

"It's the digital age," one of Bianca's worshippers, sorry friends piped up in agreement.

Luke gave her one look and she ran o .

Bianca sighed.

While Luke confronted the girls, his friends backed him up. Around them, a huge crowd had gathered. This drama had escalated beyond anyone's imagination. No one expected the reaction that this poster would stir in Luke.

He was not about to let anyone get away with it.

"Find Jamie. I want to hear from her," Luke ordered.

He was going to hunt down every single person who had ever seen this photo and interrogate them. One of his basketball teammates nodded and went on his way.

"It was me. I did it," a voice confessed.

**

**

**

They turned slowly and stared in disbelief. Total, complete, abject disbelief.

"You?"

"You?"

I stood in front of them. The most popular seniors in my high school and the wider crowd that surrounded them. Everyone had the same look of shock painted over their faces.

Yes. It was me.

"I did it," I said, "It's not going to look great on my college apps."

The look of fire in Luke's eyes melted when he saw me. His fist unclenched, and circulation returned to his hand.

"It was you, Minnie?"

I nodded, retaining control of my voice, despite the shaking in my own hands.

"You did this... to yourself?" Jake asked, staring at me since he couldn't understand my motive.

"Uh..." Chad didn't want to point out the obvious question but, "Why?"

"This photo created so much drama," I said, "It caused a breakup. It's been used to threaten me, to silence me... and I refuse to be silenced."

I took a deep breath and projected my voice louder, "Some fools thought this would take me down. I refused to be trapped by threats. Now you see what I can do to myself, imagine what I can do in retaliation. I won't be messed around with anymore."

I didn't need to say more. I was talking to all the people who had laughed at me, ignored me, insulted me over the last year. I was talking to whoever blackmailed me with these photos, tried to strike fear in me to change my own behavior.

I change my life.

They had messed with the wrong girl.

Austin whispered, "Who's she talking to?"

I was so done with being a target. That was a lesson Luke Dawson taught me. Take sh*t from nobody. He may go too far on that front, but he showed me its worth.

I won't shy into the shadows anymore.

Out of nowhere, Oma began to clap. Her clap filled the silence and echoed down the hall. Bianca stood uncomfortably next to her friend and asked her to stop.

Oma refused, "I stand a boss."

**

Not many students joined Oma's clapping. I'll be honest. The bell rang and the crowd began to disperse. First period started as if it was just another regular day.

Except that it wasn't.

I felt like I stood up for something today.

Even though no one else understood it. I had printed 100 copies of this shameful picture and posted it across school before 8AM. I was tired. But relieved.

Standing face-to-face with my own humiliation was liberating. No one could use this against me again. No one could test me on it again. In a way, I freed myself.

I took myself down to build myself up.

I didn't have time today to speak with Luke or Jake about what happened last night at their home. I wanted to. This cat-and-mouse game between the three of us needed to end.

Only problem was, that I couldn't find them. We were all busy facing our own demons. Luke had a basketball game that night and I...

I had been dealing with this.

At school, I had a shi at Lola Rae, before arriving home. Mum was walking through the front door at the same time. She paused when she saw me and waved her phone in my face.

"Do you know who called me at work today, young lady?" we both knew she would answer her own question, so I waited it out. "Your principal!"

Uh oh.

He would not have appreciated my tactics for self-liberation.

Occasionally, my mother takes her motherly duties seriously. It must have been a slow news day.

"Who did this to you?" she asked, shoving the phone in my face again.

"Mum, your screen's o . I can't see what you're showing me."

"Oh," she took a few minutes to open her phone and then showed me the email attachment.

I already knew what she was about to show me. It had become the most popular photo I've ever taken. The photo. \$1-bill-in-my-bra photo.

Clearly, the principal did not approve.

"Isn't that awkward for the principal to have as a file on his phone?" I said. I thought it was a fair question.

"Was it Luke? Did he do this to you?" My mother screamed, "Was this a setup? I knew hanging out with that gang wouldn't be good for you. His parents look down on us, you know!"

I didn't expect her to react this way. She threw her briefcase onto the couch and took o her heels.

When it comes to my performance at school, she is kind of serious.

Ish.

"I'm going to have a word with their parents. Those boys think they can mess with anyone."

"Mum, please. It's not what you think."

"Not what I think! Look what they have done to you! That's why they were hanging out with you. Think of your reputation. Everyone will see this photo!"

"But I did it. I put the posters up."

"No. No! Whatever led you to this was influenced by them," she went to the front door and pushed it open. I hurried a er her as she walked across the street.

I knew that Luke was at his basketball game and I was sure Mr Dawson was with him. But his mother was home, and I didn't want to create another scene at the Dawson house.

The last one was more than enough.

"Mum! Please stop!" I stood in her way. She pushed me.

A motorbike geared up on the corner of the street. Jake saw us in the middle of the street, and took his foot o the accelerator. My mother was barefoot and yelling at me. I was close to tears.

He stopped and took his helmet o . He gave me a concerned look and I shook my head, not wanting him to intervene.

My mum saw him and pointed, "That Dawson family looks down on everyone else like we're dirt. When your father le , they blamed me. They said I was the wreck that drove him away."

My mother started to cry. I wasn't sure what was happening. All I knew was that this wasn't just about the photo.

Sometimes, I fail to realize the life my mother had before us... and the life she has now struggling to raise two daughters by herself.

I'll never understand how di icult it was for her to handle.

I wrapped my arm around my mother's shoulder and took the phone out of her hand. She had suddenly gone weak. I escorted her home. The door closed shut behind us.

"Pour me a martini," she said.

"No, mum. Let me take you to bed."

It was the first time in my life that I took control.

**

I had spent all day looking for Jake. And just when I saw him, I had to walk away. I didn't regret it. Family comes first.

That night I heard the sound of cars pulling up on our street. Loud music and laughter blared out of the vehicles.

"Luke! You killed it today!"

"Bye Luke! Call me!"

He must have won the basketball game tonight. Another trophy for the golden boy.

Eventually, the cars drove o and the sound died down. Our street became quiet once more. I lay under my covers and tried to close my eyes.

A few minutes later, my phone beeped.

Are you awake? I want to talk to you. Luke

I didn't answer. A couple minutes later, he sent another text.

Your lights are on. Come on Minnie, let's talk. About today and yesterday Luke

So much had happened. Our kiss, the fight at his parents' house, the photo. All in 24 hours...

I'm tired, Luke. Sorry Millie

I turned the switch and my bedroom was covered in darkness.

It's ironic to me that the boy most famous for hurting girls, is the one who is always helping me.

It's confusing. I've been mistreated and hurt so much in the past. I'm trying to find my way and my voice. Being with Luke has brought a lot of drama... but adventure too.

I was emotionally drained from it all. I needed a time out.

I forced myself to not think about Luke. I thought about him way too much. I turned in my bed and flued up the pillow. Come on, sleep.

I started to imagine garden gnomes at a garden party.... and soon dri ed o to sleep.

I was asleep when my phone buzzed with one more text. The screen lit up.

Our kiss was unforgettable. Luke

**

I regret not answering my phone that night. Luke le for an away game the next day and I wouldn't see him for a couple more days.

I wanted to speak with Jake first, because every time I spoke to Luke, I thought about how open-ended I had le things with his brother.

They clearly had issues.

I know Jake and I were not dating. But we agreed to go on a date and my antics had blown our date in a rude way. It wasn't fair to Jake.

Luke can make me feel so many things that I forget to be rational. He takes rational and throws it out of the window.

Now I had messed up both friendships and been hypocritical in the process.

Not to mention that I now actually had to read the play for English Lit... instead of seeing it at the theater.

On Wednesday, I arrived at school with only half a chapter read. But my day was completely derailed when I witnessed the boys about to do something unthinkable....

Austin, Jake and Chad stood in the middle of the school hallway.

They waited for the crowds to form before they unraveled the posters in their hands.

I was part of the crowd, lost within the sea of phones and whispers. I didn't know what they were doing. Everyone clamored for a view of the image. The boys raised it high and pressed it against the locker walls, pasting it for the entire school to see.

Many gasped.

Austin, Jake and Chad looked attractive together, like some new boy-band I would pay to watch breathe.

They must have rehearsed their movements because they pulled it o seamlessly and simultaneously.

All three of them slapped the sticky poster against lockers and stepped aside.

The crowd swarmed around it.

It was a picture of Luke, shirtless, with a one-dollar bill folded into his black boxers. They peaked out over his blue jeans. His eyes were closed, pretending to sleep, and the background was pitch black.

On his chest was the number 5. And on the corner of the image were the words: \$1 Entry

Jake saw me through the crowd.

"Hey," Jake muttered as he approached me, "My brother and I don't get along, but we have your back."

"What d'you mean?" I asked, somewhat speechless, "It isn't over?"

"It hasn't even started," he winked, "Wait until you see my photo."

We stepped further out of the way as more of the school crowded around the three lockers. The basketball team had many more copies they would put up today.

"Jake? Thank you. I don't deserve this support," I said, and then took a deep breath, "Can we talk later? About everything?"

"Sure."

Important announcement!!

Millie will be deciding whether to give Jake a chance in the next chapter!

This story is nothing without you readers, so I want to hear your voice. Should she end up with Luke or Jake?

And why?

What have been your favorite moments in their relationship?

Your responses will help determine Millie's!! Thank you!! And please remember to vote if you like the chapter!

Shoutout to the amazing @reshaxo for the poster at the top of the chapter! X