

**Chapter 56: Your Own Grave**

Luke and Jake were surprised to see the rest of us walk out of the crowded cafeteria behind them. The hallway was busy during lunchtime and we appreciated the privacy it gave us.

Luke saw me. He walked towards me and memories of last night flashed before me.

I felt the butterflies rise in my stomach again, as his hands touched my arms. His left hand squeezed mine and he leaned down to kiss me. All I wanted to do was kiss back.

"In here!" Austin said, walking into an empty classroom and waving everyone in behind him.

He gave Luke a sharp look.

I tried to decipher what it meant. Austin and Luke had been friends for so long, that so much could be communicated unspoken between them.

"He doesn't want me to kiss you in front of Jake," Luke explained, knowing exactly what I was thinking.

Austin wanted us to be respectful in front of Jake. I glanced over.

Bianca was busy complimenting him, "That was an unbelievable performance last night, Jake. I didn't know you could sing like that."

"Thanks, I've been working on that song for a couple months now," he answered, and his eyes flickered over mine.

I blushed. Come clean my conscience said. But not like I did back at the Dawson house. My confession had caused a total meltdown there.

"He can't shut his mouth," Luke muttered, noticing the look Jake gave me and was not pleased by it.

"You've got something to say to my face?"

They were head-to-head in a way that immediately reminded me of the last fight. Thankfully, Austin wriggled in between them and shoved them apart.

Luke got straight to the point now, not wanting to hang around any longer than he needed to.

"I heard you've been talking sh\*t about me," he said, "to her."

He gave me a look. He knew I didn't like when he swears.

Jake fired back, "So insecure that you're spying on us."

Luke glanced in my direction and winked. "See, I'm not overconfident."

It's true. I call him cocky all the time.

I tried not to laugh. I didn't want to undermine Jake.

"Anyway Jakey, thank you for that, but no," Luke said, "People like to tell me things. Be careful what you say in class. You should stick to your Shakespeare."

My mouth dropped open. Who's listening to us in English Lit?

"I don't know what's going on anymore," I stepped up to the conversation.

It was a sticky, ugly one but we needed to have it. All three of us. And despite the romantic moments Luke and I have had... there was still something on the back of my mind...

"You're both calling each other insincere," I declared, "Saying that your motives for liking me are deceitful. Imagine how much more insecure that makes me. One of you is lying. Or both of you." Eenie, minnie, miney, mo...

I've been cheated on before. I've been lied to before. And I've been told I'm not worth much by most of the people around me. Sue me for being cautious.

"Jake noticed you because I noticed you," Luke said, "Simple."

"Don't even try that, Luke. I met her in a class. I didn't run her down the street."

"No you didn't," Luke objected. "That's our story."

When I ran over his laptop in my car. Seems like ages ago now.

"I moved here a couple months ago and you haven't shown her kindness in the seventeen years before that."

"Jake's been a good friend when I didn't have any," I conceded. It was the truth.

"What the hell?" Luke protested, "It didn't take Jake coming here for me to notice anything. Haven't you met me by now? I do my own thing on my own time."

"OK, but you took a really long time," I said, a little quieter since I was embarrassed to admit it.

"That's true," Bianca remarked. Austin nudged her, but she stuck to her comment, "What? It is true."

"I didn't ignore you," Luke sighed, "I didn't know you existed."

"That makes it much better," Jake smirked sarcastically, "Dig your own grave, brother."

"We are in different years at school! We have completely different friends and hobbies. When was I supposed to have noticed you?"

"We're neighbors," I said, "You used to throw your basketball into our front lawn. We've been in the same math class and... I don't know. Sometimes I think you don't really acknowledge people around you. Do you remember my sister's name?"

There was a very long silence. No one wanted to fill the quiet I left, which was my last words hang in the air.

Suddenly, someone at the door interrupted us. A tall, lanky teacher with an arm full of papers.

"Can you wrap this rehearsal up? I have a class here in five."

He must've thought we were drama club. We aren't.

I suddenly remembered that Luke, Jake and I weren't the only people in the room. Chad, Austin, Bianca and Cearra had all taken seats in the front of the class to watch us. Virtual popcorn being passed around.

Cearra exclaimed, "Now that was a performance. Is it awkward if I clap?"

"Very," Bianca answered.

Chad grabbed his bag and headed to the door. "Y'all have issues," he commented, "but remember my charity event this Saturday. Even you're invited, Millie. I already told you about it."

Bianca delayed her own exit by telling Luke, "I know how you can end all this drama. You end it."

End it with me. That's what she meant.

I glanced back at Luke and Jake. I felt like we hadn't made things better between us. I was bringing my own insecurities into this, which may or may not be fair depending on whether one of these boys is playing me.

Cearra and I left them behind, Jake and Bianca walked over until it was only Austin and Luke left.

Austin whispered, "You're trying to remember her sister's name, aren't you?"

Luke didn't respond.

"It's Julia," Austin helped out.

"No, that's her friend," Luke shook his head, "Damn. It started with an F."

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Roland Chadwick II hosts his annual charity event at his mansion in Tarltsdale. Chad sent me the invite via text and told me it was circus themed.

Normally, my Saturdays begin with a morning in bed, because I'm productive like that.

This time, I woke up to both my sister and mother at my door.

"I have a date today with a guy I met at the grotto party," Flora announced, shoving my foot away so she could sit on my bed.

My mother chucked my clothes on my red chair and sat down as well. They made themselves comfortable.

I yawned and sat up, "What time is it?"

"Now I can cancel my date to come to Chad's charity event or I can bring the guy with me," Flora suggested.

"I don't know," I answered truthfully, "I can ask Chad. I'll text him."

Flora grabbed my phone from my bedside table and handed it to me. I poked my hand out from under the warm covers and accepted it.

"When did you and Luke become friends?" Flora asked me.

"This summer."

"Why does he like you?"

"I don't know."

"Do you know anything?"

My mother intervened at that point, "That's enough, Flora. You should get ready for your date and enjoy some one-on-one time with this new boy. There will be many more parties in the future."

I lowered my phone, realizing that I didn't have to text Chad after all.

My mother then did something none of us expected. She pulled out a small purple box and offered it to me, "Tarltsdale is a very posh neighborhood. I don't want you to stick out like a sore thumb, which you tend to do."

The box opened with a satisfying pop.

And a beautiful silver necklace was inside, glinting in the dim light of my room. It rested on a soft satin base.

"Your father is a f\*cker but he did give me some great jewelry," mum said.

"And us," Flora added.

"What?" Mum asked, distracted by the memory.

"He gave you us," she repeated.

"Yeah. Right."

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When Chad's father throws a party, things get crazy.

No expenses spared.

Giant confetti cannons sprayed over the lawn. Magicians and clowns wandered through the crowd, entertaining guests with their magic tricks and juggling acts. Popcorn stands and cotton candy machines supplied endless sugar.

There was even a petting zoo.

I had to take a photo. I wasn't sure who I was going to send it to, but I had to save it in my favorites.

I had arrived a little late, as my car broke down again on the way over. It was now in the parking lot - the one busted car next to all the Bentleys and Teslas.

"Take a ticket."

A man dressed in a red-and-yellow circus themed outfit held a box in his hands.

"Ticket?" I clarified.

"Yes," he said and churned the handle until a ticket fell out of the big box, "For your table."

He handed me a sparkly ticket with table number 7 on it. I suppose it was for lunch.

"You won't need that," Luke called out, walking up to me. He'd seen me through the crowd.

The man and I both turned to watch Luke, dressed casually in an open button shirt and t-shirt. It moved against the light breeze as he walked towards us. Sometimes I almost wonder if there's an invisible wind machine that rules his hair wherever he goes.

He put the ticket back in the man's box.

In the middle of this extravaganza, there was a circus tent with 'Chadwick Circus' written in bold letters at the entrance. No one had gone inside yet, but we were about to.

The entrance to the tent was closed, but Luke spread the folds open and raised it over my head. I ducked and entered.

A magical effect of flowers and candles hung from the ceiling. Circular tables were dotted throughout the tent, each one inspired by a different circus act. Two acrobats were rehearsing in the center, where a golden arena had been carved out in the middle.

And Luke led me to the one table that was brimming with people. I should've expected it. That crew never hung out with everyone else. They always expected exclusivity.

The girls were wearing risqué dresses, sparkling with jewelry and accessories that matched the theme. I saw Oma, Bianca, Charlotte and Nicole. On the boy side, there was Austin, Chad, Charlotte's boyfriend and another guy I didn't recognize.

"Beautiful necklace," Charlotte smiled at me as we approached the group.

Someone else was complimenting Nicole at the same time and I overheard her respond, "Thank you. It's Versace."

Fancy little macaroons were on a silver tray in the middle of the table along with drinks in fancy goblets.

I saw my name engraved in a burgundy-colored place card next to Chioma Dozie's. Luke swapped her card with his and took his seat next to me.

He relaxed his muscular arm on the back of my chair and leaned towards me. He was about to whisper something in my ear when giant trumpets sounded overhead.

"The Chadwick Circus invites all guests to lunch in the main tent!"

A band blasted percussion music as the curtains to the tent were ceremoniously flung open. Guests poured in to take their places at the surrounding tables per their ticket number.

"Is that Malik?" I tugged Luke's shirt, pulling him closer to me.

Luke didn't object in the slightest. His hair tickled my cheek as he looked in the direction I pointed, and his arm rested on my shoulder.

It was Malik, our Apple Camper from this summer. The one who had a crush on Stacey and liked playing basketball with Luke. He was with his father, an employee at the bank Chad's father worked at.

I wanted to go over to him but the lights dimmed and the acrobats began their performance. Waiters served the starter course.

I stared down at my plate. A lump of a yellow ball stared up at me.

"Uh... Chad?" I gulped, "What is this?"

"Sou lé suisse," he answered, already digging in.

What?

He noticed my confused expression and grudgingly sighed, "It means cheese sou lé. It's not going to attack you, Millie."

"Sou lé sounds a lot like something to me," I mumbled under my breath.

Charlotte's boyfriend made light conversation from across us, "You're probably won't eat too much, will you Luke? Big game this afternoon."

Luke gave him a slow nod. He didn't engage much with his sister's boyfriend. I couldn't blame him, as I knew what I witnessed when I had dinner at their home.

"What's the big game?" I whispered to Luke.

"A basketball game for charity at the school. Winner donates \$500k. Chad's dad is team captain and Nicole's dad is captain of the other team."

"Our fathers are both partners at the same bank," Nicole said about herself and Chad, "Such a shame you're not playing on our side though, Luke. We asked you early this time."

"He's my friend," Chad said.

I imagined the teams had been assembled as "friends and family" for each side. Makes sense that they would recruit Luke for basketball.

But what doesn't make sense... is how the winner pays \$500k.

As entertainment over lunch, magicians performed tricks at each table. I was very excited when they came to ours.

They made Bianca's pearl earring disappear and then reappear on Luke's plate. My head spun as I looked to my left and then to my right. The magician dazzled us, and the music lets us enter.

By the time dessert came, guests were already on their feet. Some were dancing, others were surrounding the acrobatic in the arena and more still were watching the magicians.

Charlotte came over to me and asked, "So which of my brothers did you choose in the end? Is it really Luke now or are you still playing them off each other?"

I wasn't drinking or I would've spat it out in shock.

"I'm not playing them off each other," I defended myself, "I'm with Luke."

"Have you told Jake?"

Of course his sister was right. I was in the wrong.

"Not yet," I said, regretfully, "I've wanted to, but he's not here this weekend."

I'd been texting him to find a time to chat, as my last attempt failed, but he said he wouldn't be around for a few days. I had no idea why.

Charlotte revealed, "He went to New York on Friday to audition with some record labels, but he'll be back tomorrow."

Record labels; he never mentioned that. But then again, Jake never liked to boast.

"You know he sings like a dream," she added, "That did not make it to our side of the family, right, Luke?"

Oh no, she was bringing Luke into this.

"What?" he asked.

"Want to sing for us?"

Luke glared at his sister. It was obvious that we were talking about Jake.

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Luke took me to the games area after lunch. The charity basketball match was going to start in an hour, so we had time. I was still in awe that Chad could throw a party like this in his backyard.

There was a carousel and a fun house, along with food trucks and carnival game stands. We were by the Ring Toss stand, when I turned to talk to Luke but bumped into someone else instead.

The girl I bumped into spilled her cup of shaved ice all over her shirt and screamed.

"I'm so sorry," I gasped.

She screamed in frustration and tried wiping the orange ice pieces off her white shirt. "Watch where you're going! My shirt is ruined! How could you?"

Luke intervened, "Hey Kelly, it was an accident. I'll get you another shirt from Chad."

Luke luckily knew the girl. She calmed down the moment she saw him and nodded, thanking him. He smiled comfortingly back at me and led me to get the shirt.

That's when she finally faced me... and I realized that Luke wasn't the only one who knew her.

"Kelly," I said.

Kelly Mathers.

Also known as the girl my ex-boyfriend cheated on me with.

**A/N: Anyone know what's going to happen now??**

**Millie's cheating ex simply won't disappear!**

**Also, just a thought here, but how would you feel about a sequel to this book? I'm just throwing ideas around, but there's quite a lot to continue with in a second story.... would you be interested? Please let me know by voting on this chapter (and commenting)! Thank you!**

**(Don't worry! This is not the end! Next chapter will be out on Wednesday as usual) :D**