

## 58 | Choose

### Chapter 58: Choose

The door to my mother's room slammed shut in my face.

My mother was devastated about the necklace. She used to tell me that I was a burden in this family. And now, I really was. A year so long, she had given me a gift. A gift that my own father had given her, and I had gone and lost it.

The disappointment was apparent. I'd lived up to expectations of being the daughter that ruins everything.

I looked down at my phone and saw that Luke had texted me: We're still looking. Cleaners are also on it now.

I wiped the tears from my eyes. Luke was still at Chad's estate, looking for the necklace. He hadn't given up. The boys thought it was lost. But I had another theory.

I think it was stolen... by the very person who had been blackmailing me. Vengeance for the stunt I pulled at school. I had released myself from being held hostage by that photo, and now, this was payback.

My mind went back to my mother. That necklace held a lot of memories for my mother. I had ruined it.

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"Ugh! I lost track of time in Target again!" Cearra announced over the phone.

I could hear her hurrying along the store aisles, "Yoona and Khloe are coming over for a jewelry swap in twenty minutes and I'm still in the home décor section. Ooh, metal straws."

Jewelry. Sore subject for me right now.

"I'm happy you're back on track with them," I said, lying on my bed, wallowing in my own sadness.

I didn't have the heart to tell her what happened. I was also relieved to be distracted.

"I told you I would be fine. Your friend is the fakest of all time by the way."

"Who? Julia?" I asked, "You spent way more time with her than I did this semester."

"No way. I saw her, like, once a week when we invited her for lunch."

"No, come on. She was hanging out with you all the time."

I could hear a door shut, "I'm in the car now. I gotta go. Have fun being grounded tonight."

We hung up and I was in my room, staring at my vinyl collection. If I sold it and combined that cash with the money in my savings account, could I buy a necklace that would replace the one I lost for my mum?

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### Monday

"Minnie, I know you're in grieving mode right now, but you agreed to a date. Would you still be excited for that?" Luke asked me on Monday after school.

He had basketball practice and I had my shift at Lola Rae, but we stood in the parking lot. I stared up at him. At his kind blue eyes and treasured how far we had come together.

"Yes, we are still on and I am excited," I said, "What day?"

"You mean what night."

I shoved him and he playfully smiled, "How about Saturday night?"

"That works," I answered and felt the tingling sensation run through my body again. The one that only came when I was about to kiss Luke.

"I'll make it special," he said.

I smiled at that. I couldn't help myself. He was everything I never expected him to be.

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### Tuesday

"I want Millie to feel comfortable around everyone," Luke said at lunchtime.

The whole gang was in the classroom, having lunch among themselves. They played music in the background and had ordered take-away delivered to the school.

Millie was not at the table and Bianca sighed, annoyed that every discussion seemed to end in a connection to Millie.

"Why wouldn't she be comfortable?" Chad asked, "I invited her to my party on Saturday, which was epic by the way. Everyone loved it."

Luke put his fork down and glanced at the girls on the end of the table, "She said she hasn't had the warmest welcome by some girls in this school."

Bianca shrugged, "I don't know what you possibly mean."

"Then why don't you take her out on Friday night?" Luke suggested, wanting Bianca to back up her words with some evidence, "Show her a good time."

"I'm busy," Bianca answered, "Sorry. Would've been so fun otherwise."

"We're going to a bar that night with other people," Oma explained, "But I'm sure we'd be happy to invite Millie along."

"Sounds great," Luke nodded.

"And I'll come too," Austin chimed in, "To make sure everyone's kindness isn't misinterpreted."

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### Wednesday

Jake and I left our English class together. Finally, he was back from his trip to New York City.

"So how did it go?" I asked him, "The auditions must've been nerve wracking. You've got a lot of talent so I'm sure it went well."

"They seemed more focused on my look, to be honest. It feels like music is more about marketing these days, unfortunately," he answered, looking down at his shoes.

"But you have a good look," I answered, and then quickly made sure that that was not misinterpreted, "After all, your brother sets a high standard."

He gave me a weird look. Even I gave myself a look. A look of absolute horror. What had I just said?

"What?" Jake asked.

"Never mind. I'm saying that I think your brother's attractive, but we weren't talking about that."

"Maybe we should. I don't want him to hurt you."

"Neither do I," I said and joked, "Looks like we're on the same page."

He shook his head. "Nah, not until you and I--"

"Sorry Jake, I really like Luke."

"We'll see."

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### Thursday

I entered the mathlete classroom for the first time this school year. I had been avoiding this place.

Before my breakup, I was a member of the math club. I enjoyed the subject. My ex-boyfriend and I met each other through math, though that sounds weird to say.

And after we broke up, I ran away from this side of myself to avoid the memories. But now, I was back. To think I had ever left because of a man.

No. Because of a boy.

He's no man. I've met some real men now.

"Millie! Hi!" Joe popped his head up from an algorithm and stood up to give me an awkward pat on my shoulder.

That was Joe's way of saying hello. I smiled when I saw his red-and-white striped suspenders. It reminded me of Luke and that night we kissed on the basketball court.

"How are you, Joe? I haven't seen you in a while," I said, though it was my fault he hadn't.

"You know where I am, Millie. I'm always here," he answered and gave me a big smile.

"Do you think if someone leaves, they can come back?" I asked, nervous that the mathletes wouldn't accept me again.

I wanted to never be pushed out of following my passion because of a boy. Fear is a mental state and that is nothing to be afraid of. Someone stubborn and cocky taught me that.

"Do you want to join the club again?" Joe asked me.

"Yes."

He didn't say much except, "Once a mathlete, always a mathlete."

It was that simple.

I laughed, "That makes me happy to hear."

I took a good look around the classroom, at all the charts that hung on the wall and the books we kept in the side of the classroom. It's been a while. That's when I noticed a Mrs Field's cookie wrapper stuck between two stools.

"Do you tutor here today? I thought tutoring was on Wednesdays," I said.

"Yeah it still is. Don't worry Millie, nothing's changed since you left."

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### Friday

The time at home passed by agonizingly slowly. Guilt ate away at me and every time I saw my mum, disappointment was on the tip of her tongue. That necklace.

The only positive, is that I read Taming of the Shrew. So that was good.

The book sat on the couch beside me. And I was sitting next to my sister, who was watching TV. The doorbell rang.

She looked at me. "Well? Are you going to get that?"

I sighed and didn't bother to argue. I got up and opened the door, though I immediately regretted it. I should really look through the eye hole before letting anyone in.

Flora looked to see who was there and sighed.

"Is this still a thing? It's like watching a TV show and replaying it all the time. Can you just move on from this already?"

Jake and Luke were at the door.

Neither of them were smiling.

"I don't know what you see in her," Flora continued, eating chocolates as she commented, "Seriously, you could date any girl in our school."

Luke walked past me and took the remote out of her hand. He switched the TV on and said, "Could you give us a moment?"

She stared, chocolate midway to her mouth, and dropped it. "Y-y-yes, of course. I'll be in my room if you want to join."

"I don't."

Flora scurried out of there and I stared at the two brothers. There was so much conflict between them and I really didn't know why they were at my door. Luke walked back towards me. I hadn't budged from the door and neither had Jake.

"What's this about?" I asked.

"We got into another fight," Jake said.

"Jake still thinks he's got a shot."

"At what?" I asked.

They better not be talking about me in this way.

"I mean," Jake confessed, embarrassed, "I just want you to know how I really feel and if you'd consider giving me a chance. You don't know me or my brother that well. You haven't committed to any one of us. You haven't dated any one of us."

"We're asking you to choose," Luke finished the sentence.

"Once and for all," Jake added.

I stared at them. I stared from one handsome boy to the other and then back again.

"Did you hear us?" Jake asked.

I nodded, slowly. And then I grabbed Luke and pushed him out of the door. He stumbled onto Jake and they fell back before I slammed the door shut.

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The doorbell rang again.

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And again.

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And again.

"Answer the damn door!" Flora screamed from upstairs.

I sighed and opened it. The two boys were still standing there, looking ashamed.

"Are you seriously coming here to give me an ultimatum in my own home?" I asked, "I will not be put in a situation where you give me a deadline. If I take more time than you want, you don't have to stay here. And I refuse to treat either of you in such a terrible way. Imagine what rejection feels like. You're brothers. You shouldn't compete like this and I won't take part."

It's twisted.

Jake accepted my words with a nod of his head, but he also asked, "What's holding you back though? We've both told you we liked you, but you haven't jumped on either one of us."

Luke walked into the house. He wasn't about to be pushed out by me again.

"Truthfully, you came like a breath of fresh air, Jake," I said, though my eyes were on Luke, "You've been kind and warm to me and I want to thank you for that. But I can't follow through with the date we agreed on because I'm in a situation with Luke."

"Is that what you call it?" Luke interrupted, "A situation?"

"You think it's been a walk in the park?" I retorted.

He shrugged and casually leaned against the back of the couch, "I think it's been a slice of pie."

Minnie's pie.

I blushed at his reference.

"Ok," Jake brought the conversation back on track, "You and my brother have history, I can see that. It doesn't mean I think it's going to last, but I can back off if you want me to."

"Great," Luke answered, happy we wrapped this up quickly.

Is this really the way we had to have this conversation? I had wanted to thank Jake for being a gentleman. I wanted to ask for his friendship. I wanted to apologize for being a mess of emotions at times.

And then I remembered.

Do you have moments when you flip a switch and change moods?

That's what happened. I wish I was saintly in my behavior. But the reality is, that I'm not. I'm flawed and I can change my mind. I remembered that I actually did have bones to pick with each of them.

"Yes, I want you to back off," I confirmed, "But I also want to tell you something. Jake, I did not give you any cues before you kissed me that day. It was a surprise and honestly you shouldn't go around kissing people like that."

"I shouldn't have done that," Jake agreed, "I've regretted it ever since."

Both boys were suddenly on edge. They could tell that my tone of voice had changed.

"And Luke, I hope you're not one of those guys who insult girls and then hooks up with them," I said, "Because that's how we started. I haven't forgotten the good moments we've shared since this summer, but I also can't forget how I felt when you first insulted me. You called me ugly, clumsy, crazy, a dying cat... and I have more respect for myself than to just forget it when you smile at me."

Though he had a nice smile.

The expression on his face was timeless. He was caught out - he's usually quick to reply with a smart ass comment, but not this time. He couldn't twist reality. Those were words he had said to me, and that was the way he used to behave.

"I'm sorry, Millie," he apologized, "I never meant to make you feel bad and I should never have made fun of you like that. I was on a high horse, thinking the world revolved around me, when it really doesn't. I'm sorry."

An apology. I'd never heard him say it before, but it's always the first step.

"I know you haven't behaved like that in a while," I said, "but I need to be certain of it. I look around and I don't see many relationships that stand the test of time, so I want to be cautious."

The truth is, that I do believe he was different now. And I can accept an apology when someone knows they've been wrong. I won't stand for it again though.

"Thank you," I said, "I needed that. And I believe you."

Jake began to back off. This moment was for me and Luke.

Luke started to walk towards me and said, "I'm looking forward to our date tomorrow. This isn't a fake-Jake-date. You and I are going out and it will be special."

"You keep saying that, Luke, and it's just raising my expectations even further."

"Oh, don't you worry. It'll be worth it," he smiled and pulled me into his arms to kiss me.

**A/N: Did you like the chapter??**

**Only two chapters left!**

**Next chapter will be out on Wednesday as usual BUT the one after that is the final chapter! So I want to publish it at a good time, that suits as many of us as possible. What day/time (and remember to mention time zone) would you prefer?**

**Thank you for following me to the end. Please consider a vote if you enjoy the story even a little bit :)**