



He Called Me Fat

Author: *Spooky*

Category: Romance, Fantasy

Description: Ava Miller never thought her first party in months would end in tears, certainly not because of him. Peter Arthur was beautiful, arrogant, and so popular that no one could touch him. He didn't simply ignore her; he called her fat out loud twice.

Ava runs away into the darkness, where she always goes when she's embarrassed and wants to vanish. But when Peter unexpectedly goes outside to say he's sorry, things start to change. Is he being honest? Or is this simply another mean joke?

As Ava gently allows him in, their friendship grows from something weak to something stronger. Peter breaks down the barricades Ava constructed around herself with every late-night phone call, lunchtime getaway, and moment of unanticipated closeness. But trusting him also means facing the doubts she's never really gotten rid of, even after losing six dress sizes.

Ava will have to choose if Peter is the exception in a world that always tells her she's "not enough," or the same heartache in a better package.

He Called Me Fat is a strong and moving story about self-worth, first love, betrayal, and the bravery it takes to believe you are more than what people see and that you are enough just as you are.

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Chloe, my closest friend, slapped my hand away from the top of my strapless dress, which I was attempting to draw up to my neck. She took hold of both of my hands and clasped them in her own.

“I know you’re scared, but you look beautiful, dear. Now say, “I am hot and ferocious.”

“I am sexy and fierce,” I murmured.

“Come on, baby, I know you can do better than that. I’m sexy and fierce.”

“I am so sexy and so fierce!” I yelled at the top of my lungs. This made some of the folks who were walking into the house we were in front of stop and look at me like I was crazy.

I believe Ava Miller shouldn’t wear short skirts or dresses to parties.

“That’s better,” Chloe said, “now, let’s get high-class drunk.” She slung her arm over my shoulder and proceeded to take me up the stairs of the home, which was playing Rihanna’s “Diamonds” at a very loud volume.

I couldn’t stop thinking about my banger legs rubbing against one other, even though Chloe thought I looked great. I felt quite self-conscious since I knew that other people could see it. I used to be a size 18, but then I joined a gym and started running every morning before school. I was a size 12, which was good enough for me but not always.

I would always think of myself as the obese girl who couldn't breathe after jogging up two flights of stairs. Chloe said I needed to meet people my own age and quit fantasizing that I was Elizabeth waiting for my Mr. Isaac. That's why I was going to this party.

Chloe waved her palm in front of my face to grab my attention and asked, "Ava, where did you go? I'm going to get drinks for both of us."

I nodded to her and watched as she proceeded towards the drinks table, which had a lot of various kinds of alcohol on it. I looked about at my classmates, most of whom were from Westbrook Academy, dancing to the loud music while others were making out in every dark nook they could find.

There was a couch a few steps away from where I was standing that Chloe could see me from. She came up to it and sat down. I tugged down on my little black dress and wished I had a band to tie up my thick brown hair since it was making me feel so hot.

I bobbed my head to the music and tried to seem as calm and cool as I could.

"Hey fatty, do you mind going around so my girls and I can sit down?" a voice beside me said. I didn't think it was meant for me, so I kept bobbing my head and looked at the ground.

"Hey fatty, are you deaf too? Stop taking up so much space and go around." I knew the person was talking to me, so I glanced up and saw one of the most beautiful people I had ever seen.

I saw piercing gray-green eyes looking back at me. I saw his disheveled blonde hair, his slightly crooked nose, which made him even more attractive, and his large pink lips, which were perfect for kissing.

“Ehmm.” I peered back into his eyes and saw that he was looking at me like I was a bug he wanted to get rid of. I looked from him to the two girls, who were dressed in a way that made them appear like whores and were hanging off of both of his arms. They both looked like they weighed half as much as I did and then I remembered that this beautiful Greek woman had called me fat twice.

I could feel the tears coming on, so I kept blinking to keep them from dropping.

“Sorry, I’ll just move,” I said quietly. I got off the couch and put on my outfit. I had never been so aware of my fat thighs before. I spotted a door near the kitchen that led outdoors and started to walk towards it. I don’t know where Chloe went, but I couldn’t remain in here any longer. The door opened to a patio outdoors, and I sat down in a dark area on a chair.

I was so embarrassed and ashamed.

Hey, fatso.

Hey fatso.

I couldn’t stop thinking about the voice of that attractive stranger.

I buried my head in my hand and cried. No, I wasn’t just crying because I was a woman and didn’t want to mess up my makeup. I was full out, weeping my eyes out. I don’t know why that hurt so much, but I assumed that losing six sizes would help since I was always the kid who got her picture taken with a piece of chocolate cake on her lips. Guys who looked like that guy in there would never look at ladies like me. No, they would go for Mimi and Kiki, who he had draped over his arms.

It felt like hours, but it was only a few minutes until I heard the kitchen door open and someone stepped out.

I heard the individual say, “F**k, I need a smoke.” I got anxious because I recognized the voice as the guy who had just called me “fatty” a few minutes before.

He took out a cigarette, and a few seconds later, the air smelt like smoke. I wasn’t weeping as loudly as I had been, but I must have produced a noise that caught his attention because his sharp gray-green eyes turned towards me. He saw that I looked messy from sobbing and moved closer to me.

“Are you okay?” I looked up at him and didn’t utter a thing. Is this the same person who called me fat inside? He couldn’t have because he seemed like he cared about how I answered his question.

He looked down at me for a few seconds, then tilted his head to the side. I realized right once that he knew I was the girl from the inside.

It may have been the way his eyes got bigger or when he mumbled,

“Shit.”

After he yelled at me, I simply sat there and gazed at him. He turned away quickly, and I thought he was going to go, but he moved to the other chair at the other corner of the patio and brought it closer to me.

I watched as he sat down in the chair and drew it further closer to me until our knees were practically touching. I felt self-conscious again about what I was wearing, so I pulled down on my dress.

The handsome stranger’s hand softly brushing my leg made me jump, and as I looked up, I saw worried gray-green eyes.

“Look, I didn’t really mean the fatty comment about inside there.” He stared at me,

expecting me to say something in response to his half-hearted apologies, but all I could do was toy with my hands in my lap. I was really bewildered. How could this person who had just insulted me be the same one who was attempting to make me feel better?

I guess hechai didn't like that I didn't respond, so he kept on. "Look," he began, stroking the back of his neck, "I'm a total asshole, and I say completely assholish things without thinking."

I was astonished and laughed at the statement, and I wiped the last of my tears away. It looked like my chuckle made him feel better, and he looked down at me and said,

"I'm really sorry. Do you feel better now that I've apologized?"

"Kinda," I murmured.

"Let's forget about how I was an asshole for a minute and start over. Hi, I'm Peter. It's nice to meet you. What's your name?"

He invited me to shake his hand. I was still a bit bewildered and dazed, but I, Fat Aberta, had a tremendously hot belly attempting to make up for what he had done wrong before, and I wasn't going to mess it up.

I reached out and took his hand in mine. "Hey, I'm Ava," I began. "It's not the best way to meet you, but it's still nice to meet you."

He laughed and added, "Ohh, I think I deserved that." His laughing stopped, and a stillness that wasn't unpleasant but yet wasn't comfortably formed between us. I was more conscious of our knees touching, and it wasn't bad at all. It was actually very wonderful.

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“You don’t have to stay outside with me anymore. You can go back to the party if you want,” I added.

“No, I’m not missing anything. There’s a little bit of a prince inside this black heart that can’t leave damsels in distress, especially when I’m the one who upset you,” he added, pointing to his chest. The movement made me gaze at the t-shirt that was hugging his clearly toned stomach. I immediately looked back up into his eyes, hoping he didn’t notice me looking at him.

“What about Kiki and Mimi?”

I can’t believe I just said that. But he didn’t appear upset since he broke out laughing.

“You mean Lexi and Riley? They were getting on my nerves with all the giggling in my ear. By the way, nice names. I’m going to use them again sometime.”

“Thanks, I have my moments of genius sometimes. Not to make you uncomfortable, but is it strange that I feel a little awkward talking to you after what you said to me earlier?” I asked.

“Not at all. Do you know what we need to do to make you feel better? Let’s act it out. I’ll call you ‘fatty’ again, but this time, instead of walking away, give me a good slap in the face,” he said as he got up and pulled on my arm to make me stand up, too. I wasn’t sure if this would help, but it was worth a try.

He continued, “Now before we do this, I really don’t mean to offend you when I say ‘fatty’ this time.” “

I shook my head to show that I understood, then nodded my head to let him know he could start. He smiled at me and then looked me square in the eyes and said,

“Hey fatso, what are you staring at? “

I knew this was all a game, and he had just stated he didn’t want to hurt me, but the word still wounded me. This made me a little more furious, and when I pulled my hand back and smacked him square in the face, I hit Rod with too much power.

I was quite happy to see the shocked look on his face. A red handprint had started to form on the cheek I had slapped, and he started to touch it.

He laughed a little and added, “Damn, you hit really hard for a girl.”

“Wow, thanks for that, Peter. I feel much better,” I responded with a smile.

Want to have lunch?

“Oh, the pain,” Chloe moaned as she leaned against the locker. “My head feels like it’s going to explode.”

I was getting my books out for my first class when I looked up. Chloe was leaning against the locker next to mine with black sunglasses on her face.

“What’s the matter with you? The celebration occurred on Friday, and today is Monday. I told her, “I didn’t know you drank that much to have such a strong hangover.”

“I don’t feel bad. I woke up this morning and noticed that it was Monday and school was coming up. I had a bad headache.

I don't know why Chloe skips school. They say high school is hell, but when Chloe first walked through the gates of our school, it shook her hand and said, "Hey, I'll be your heaven." She was naturally popular, had real friends, and was well-liked. She wasn't beautiful in the traditional sense, but her personality shone through, and she was stunning. She was wearing a size four body that was currently clad in a fitting white mini skirt, a tank top that stopped mid-off, showing off her belly button, and three-inch heels. Her naturally platinum blonde hair was in a messy bun on top of her head.

Chloe said that I looked like a Coca-Cola bottle since I had lost weight, and she looked like a ruler. I might concede that I had more curves, but at least hers weren't wrapped in fat.

"Come on," I urged, pulling her away from the locker and towards our first-period AP History class. "You're too annoying for your own good, and I don't want to be late for my first period."

I was able to pull her for a few more seconds until she ripped her arm away and started walking by herself.

"Talking about the party on Friday, you left for about an hour, and when you came back, your cheeks were all red, and you looked like you had just come back from a midnight tryst," Chloe added.

I tripped on the flat ground because of what she said, and I'm sure she would see that my face was just as bright now. Peter and I had been talking for almost an hour about something I don't remember, but I knew he was really funny and even though I was still on my guard because of what he said before, I liked being with him. I hadn't told Chloe any of this, though.

"Wha...Wha...What," he mumbled uncomfortably. "I didn't look like that; you were

the one who left me behind on the way to the drinks table.”

“Le gasp, I didn’t leave you. I came back, and you were gone, she continued, putting her hand over her heart as if I had hurt her by saying she had deserted me.

We got to history class and sat down in the middle. We weren’t quite nerds or delinquents. I don’t talk to Chloe much in class because I know she can be very distracting when she wants to be. I took out my history book and opened it to chapter thirteen, which I remembered Miss Bennett, my history teacher, saying we would be reading in class today.

I heard a noise at the door and looked up. I was astonished to see Peter walk into the classroom wearing a black sweatshirt, brown khakis, and black shoes. I don’t know if he sensed me looking at him, but he immediately looked up and stared right at me.

For a moment, I thought he didn’t know who I was or that he was going to act like he didn’t know me. But then he smiled and nodded his head, then turned and walked straight to the back of the room. I don’t know why, but I felt wonderful.

I turned to see that Chloe was looking at me with a mix of curiosity and uncertainty, and the grin that was going to bloom on my face faded. I moaned within because I knew what was coming.

“What was that all about?” She asked.

“What was that about?” I asked back, attempting to appear like I didn’t know what she was talking about. I suppose I failed badly since she asked.

“That staring contest you had with Peter Arthur, and I should add that he smiled at you.”

“Chloe, take off those dumb sunglasses. They’re making your eyesight blurry. “I was staring at him because I’ve never seen him in class before or at school, for that matter,” I said, and it was true that I didn’t know he went to our school.

“First, my sunglasses let me see better. Second, I’ll accept your explanation for why you were gazing for now. You haven’t seen him because you don’t look people in the eye because you fear they’re gazing at you and also because he’s only been here for a year. “He moved to our school in our junior year,” she said.

I never really looked at anyone. When I did, I either saw disgust or pity for the fat girl. Even though I had lost a lot of weight, I still couldn’t do it. When I think about it, I looked Peter in the eyes at the party and didn’t see either of those feelings.

“Look, Ava, you could tell me…” Chloe was cut off as our instructor came in. I knew she was going to bring it up again, but I wasn’t in the mood.

Miss Bennett began, “Good morning, class. You all look fresh and rested this Monday morning.” She looked directly at Chloe, who quickly took off her shades.

“I hope you all are ready to read a lot.” Read about Montesquieu’s Separation of Powers and Checks and Balances in chapter thirteen, and then connect it to the American Revolution. You have the full time, and in the conclusion, I’ll take it up. You may work in couples if you like.

Miss Bennett sat down behind the teacher’s desk, and I got to work on the homework, grateful that I had read the chapter previously. I knew Chloe wouldn’t want to work with me because we both liked to work alone.

I tried to avoid Chloe’s looks at me and not look back at the seat that Peter was seated in as I worked.

It was lunchtime, but Chloe and I weren't in the same lunch period, so I normally ate in the library. Mrs. Archer, the librarian, and I were really close, and she not only let me eat in the library but also bought me low-fat lunches every day.

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I was rushing down the corridor to go to the library when I hit something solid that was powerful and hard. I lost my balance and would have fallen to the floor if two strong hands hadn't reached out and grabbed me.

"I moved from never seeing you to constantly seeing you. Are you following me around?" Peter was looking down at me. When did he become so tall? He looked like he was 6'5" tall, and I was only 5'4" tall.

"I...I... "I swear I wasn't stalking you," I said, stammering.

He laughed again and replied, "I was just joking." I was the one stalking you, though. I was really seeking for you.

"To me?" "

"Yes, I usually eat off campus, but I wanted to know if you would do me the honor of having lunch with me."

Peter's invitation to lunch caught me completely off guard, but after a while, my curiosity got the better of me, and I said yes. We got into Peter's shiny dark blue Mustang and drove to The Nook Café, a small café two blocks from school. I knew it was close to school because I could walk back if things didn't go well.

Peter opened his side of the car and said, "We're here." I got out, too, and waited for him to lock his car. We walked into The Nook Café together, and I could tell people were looking at us and probably wondering what a frumpy girl like me was doing with someone as good-looking as Peter.

We sat across from one other at a corner table and didn't say a word. Before long, we were in a gazing contest that lasted for approximately two minutes before I turned away.

"So, is this just another trick to get me to forgive you for Friday?" "You already tried, and I'm not quite over it yet, but I'm getting there," I said.

"Why are you so suspicious? I'm not trying to do anything." He raised his hand to call a server to our table and stated, "I want to have lunch with a classmate."

A brunette waitress who seemed to be about our age walked up to our table.

"Hi, I'm Brooke, and I'll be your server today. "What can I get for you all?" she said, but she was facing Peter and not me. She was entirely focused on him.

"I'll have a cheese steak burger and a coke," Peter stated without even glancing at the menu. I glanced it over nonetheless, even though I knew I was going to order a salad.

"Could I please have a chicken salad without the dressing and a glass of water?" I said, "Thank you," and gave her my menu.

Peter remarked, "I didn't know you were in my history class," as the waitress moved away from the table.

"I didn't either,"

There was an unpleasant stillness at the table, and I looked around the restaurant to avoid looking at him.

"Not to be rude, but is there a point to this little get-together?" I enquired.

Peter sighed a little, then stood up and grabbed a card out of his back pocket. “There is a point to this,” he said. “I just hoped we could eat first, but let’s get to it. Now, what about showing it between the two of us, okay?”

I shook my head, dying within from curiosity.

“Sorry about the bent card,” he replied, giving her a simple white card. There was nothing on the front, and when I flipped it over, there was nothing on the back either.

Peter answered, “Open it,” with hope.

When I opened the card, there were several pictures inside. I picked up the first one, and there was a very obese youngster who looked around nine years old standing next to a very tiny boy. In another image, the same big boy was bending over a really attractive woman to get to what seemed like a platter of chips. I looked up at Peter with a query in my eyes.

“That fat boy in the pictures is me. I was about eight,” he claimed.

I looked at the images again and saw them differently. Now that I thought about it, the small child did look a bit like Peter.

“Puberty must have done wonders for you,” I remarked.

“After Friday, I went home and thought about how I used to be. I felt really bad about calling you what I did. Nobody here knows I used to like this except my family and the boy in the first picture. I thought that if I shared this part of myself with you, it would really help you.”

I grinned to myself as I gazed down at the images. Peter showing me this made me feel a little special, and I was able to really let go of his statement about my weight. I

said, “What’s the deal with this picture?” to make things better.

I slipped the photo of him reaching for the chips to him. He groaned and put his hands over his head, then lifted it back up.

“I don’t know why I chose such an embarrassing picture to show you. That woman was my mom, and she called me to come take a picture, but all I could see were the potato chips. I was a really greedy, fat kid, but I naturally lost some weight when I was twelve. By thirteen, I was doing sports, and now I’m like this.”

I laughed again as I looked at the photo again.

He reached out and placed a strand of hair that had fallen into my eyes behind my ears. “You have a really pretty laugh,” he remarked. I could feel my heart racing a little, and I leaned into him.

“Ehmm, here is your order,” the waitress from earlier stated, bringing Peter’s burger and coke in front of him and putting my salad and water in front of me, “Is that all ?”

We both nodded, the moment from earlier destroyed. I started to pick at my salad, but I couldn’t taste it.

Peter said, “So, have I completely made up for it?”

“You’re not that bad,” I answered with a smile.

“Thanks, you’re not so bad either,” he said, smiling back at me.

We began to eat, and this time, the quiet was nice. I look up and notice him gazing at me. I knew that if he looked closely, he would see that my cheeks were bright red.

Peter remarked, “You know what? Now that I think about it, you’re more than alright. I think I like you.”

I thought my cheeks were on fire now.

Who’s up for a party?

Peter asked me again on Tuesday at lunch to eat at The Nook Café outside of school. He asked me to lunch at The Nook Café outside of school on Wednesday. By Thursday, he didn’t even have to come and get me; I met him outside in his car. I had been eating lunch with Peter every day for the last two weeks, and now it was official.

Sorry, Mrs. Archer, but someone else is taking your place.

Chloe was quite distrustful of Peter and me, and it was all Evans’ fault. We had become friends since we spoke so much, so when he came into history class, he would grin at me and even wink at me sometimes. I don’t know why, but I didn’t want too many people to know about our friendship. Peter was very well-liked, and if people found out we were spending so much time together, I would be in the limelight, which I didn’t want.

It was Friday, and I had been talking to Peter for three weeks. I was sitting in my history lesson with Chloe, who was now texting under the table. Miss Bennett wasn’t here today, so we didn’t have any work to complete. I was reading chapter fifteen to get a jump start on our next session.

“I know you’ve been saying you don’t know Peter for the last two weeks, but I just wanted to let you know that he’s walking towards you right now,” Chloe remarked, interrupting the excellent paragraph I was reading on Voltaire and the Divine Rights. I looked at her, and she was grinning at me. Then I looked up and saw Peter coming towards me.

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He sat down on the chair in front of me.

“Hey,” Peter said to Chloe, then turned back to me and leaned in close to me. “I want to ask you something.”

“Just because my name is Ava doesn’t mean I want to be in your own sexy version of Fifty Shades of Grey. I’m not going to call you Master of My Universe,” I added with a smile.

Peter and I had been joking about this ever since he found out that Ava was the name of the girl in the novel. He laughed out loud, and Chloe stared at me like I had just grown two heads and was juggling balls.

He answered, “Nah, maybe you could call me that later when I come by tonight with a radio under your window.” I knew we usually joked about like this, but I knew this was for Chloe’s sake. Chloe’s eyes widened in astonishment, which proved this.

“I came to ask you out tonight. You know how you said you had trouble making friends? Well, I decided that my mission is to help you stop being so anti-social. You and I are going to party tonight at Pulse Lounge,” he said. “I would have told you at lunch today, but I have detention today and can’t make our usual lunch date.”

I wasn’t really startled because he had been dropping hints that we should go somewhere else than The Nook Café, like a party at a place called Pulse Lounge. I don’t think so.

“Thanks for the offer, Peter, but I don’t think that’s a good idea,” I remarked.

“Come on, it’ll be fun. You know you want to,” he added with a smile that made me feel better.

I shook my head no. I knew for sure that I wouldn’t feel comfortable at a party, and I remembered what had occurred at the last party I had been to.

“No, really, Ev...” I started to reply, but Chloe, who had been sitting quietly next to me the whole time, cut me off and added,

“She’d love to go with you. Tell her what time you’ll be there.”

Peter looked at me to see how I was doing and then said, “I’ll pick you up at eight. Don’t be late and wear your dancing shoes because we’re going to make some moves. Oh, and give me your phone.”

I gave him my hand when he reached out. He typed in what I thought was his phone number and then gave me the phone back.

He stood up to walk to his seat in the rear, but not before he turned to Chloe and whispered, “Thanks.”

Chloe waited until she was sure he couldn’t hear her before she whispered to me, “What was that about? I thought you said it was just my eyes playing tricks on me every time he came in smiling at you!”

“I...I...” I muttered.

“Missy, I’m not done with you. You have lunch with him every day. I feel like I don’t know you anymore. Next, I’ll find out you’re a student by day and a stripper by night,” Chloe said as she continued her diatribe.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you about lunch. I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings. Friends,” I added as I leaned in for a hug. Chloe leaned in, too, and held me tightly.

“Friends, you better know that I’m coming home with you today, and you’re going to sit and take every pinch and poke that I do to you for the party tonight. You better not complain,” Chloe stated near to my ears.

“Okay.”

“Sit still; your eyebrows look like a crazy person. I have to pluck them,” Chloe stated.

I was sitting on the side of my bed in my room when Chloe came in front of me and did something to my eyebrows that hurt a lot.

I yelled, “Aww,” at her.

“Sorry about that. If you could just sit still,” Chloe remarked.

After an hour of things like that, I was finally ready. I had my eyebrows plucked and shaped correctly, and I shaved my legs and arms. Chloe knew I liked the natural look, so I only wore a little makeup.

I was in front of the big mirror in my room. I wore a silver top that fastened behind my neck. It was snug about my breasts and flowed loosely from just below my breasts to my waist. Then, it was worn with black leggings and high silver shoes. I had brown hair done in a bun on top of my head, and Chloe had pulled some of it out so it fell in front of my face.

Even though I knew I wasn’t a size two, I had to admit that I didn’t look too awful. I looked quite fantastic and felt good about myself. The loss of weight may not be big in practice, but it was worth it to see how I appeared today compared to how I would

have looked two years ago.

Chloe came up behind me as I gazed in the mirror and remarked, “You look beautiful.”

“Yeah, I do,” I answered, and this time I really believed it.

When I left my house, I spotted Peter resting beside his car. Chloe stood behind me and put her hand on my shoulder to stop me from going any farther.

“I know you’re not sure of yourself, but you’re beautiful inside and out. I want you to have fun. Let go of everything and just have fun, okay?” she urged.

I shook my head and walked up to Peter. I heard him whistle a bit as I got closer.

“Someone took a dip in the honey pot because you sure look sweet,” he replied, humorously looking me up and down once or twice.

I looked at his dark grey t-shirt, black pants, and black boots and said, “You don’t look so bad yourself.” His hair looked like he had genuinely bothered to comb it, even though it was normally messy.

He opened the door for me and closed it when I got in. Then he moved over to the driver’s side. I turned around and saw Chloe still at the entrance. I waved to her before Peter and I left for Pulse Lounge.

Twenty minutes later, we were rolling up to a stylish structure with blue and purple neon lights that said “Pulse Lounge.” It looked like a really popular place because the queue in front of the club went on for a long time. We had to wait a long time.

Peter and I got out of the car and walked towards the people waiting in front of the

club.

“Maybe we should have come earlier,” I replied, “look at all these people.”

“Nah, no worries, my friend’s dad owns it, so I could just walk through. Come on, we’re meeting up with some of my friends,” he said.

I didn’t say anything, but I started to feel bad about myself again. I didn’t know what his pals were like, and what if they made fun of me?

Peter strolled right past all the people who were waiting in line and up to the bouncer.

Peter replied to a big man standing in front of the club door, “Hey Troy, it’s a busy night.” He had tattoos on both of his arms and as far as I could see, he also had a lip ring and an eyebrow piercing.

The bouncer looked me over and remarked, “Yeah, you found another one. This one is different from the others.” I looked up, expecting to see a look of contempt on his face, but all I saw was mild interest. Peter didn’t deny that the bouncer was telling us we were together, even though we weren’t. He merely nodded his head and walked through the rope that Troy had lifted.

Peter held my hand, and even though I knew it was merely to help me get through the busy club, it still felt great. We got to the VIP area and went through another bouncer. Peter then stopped a few steps away from a round table where three teens were laughing.

“Look, I want you to have fun, okay? I know you said you don’t like being around people like that, but those people over there,” he said, pointing to the table, “don’t know you, so you can be whoever you want to be tonight. I hope you choose to be the girl I’ve gotten to know because she’s a lot of fun. Now come on.”

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Everyone had to cajole me into having fun, even Chloe and now Peter. Well, tonight I will show them. We got to the table, and Peter released go of my hand, but not before everyone else at the table turned to look at me.

A blonde guy who seemed a little familiar jumped up and hit Peter on the back.

“Peter, my man, you’ve been avoiding me. You won’t answer my call. Is she the reason?” the blonde gentleman remarked as he reached out his hand for me to shake.

“No, I’m just a friend. My name is Ava, and it’s nice to meet you,” I said.

“Tyler and I are this bastard’s best friends. Please sit down, lovely lady.”

Tyler sat down next to a gorgeous girl with black hair. She was certainly his lover since she grabbed onto his arm. I sat next to him, and Peter sat next to me on the other side. There was a redhead girl next to Peter who looked like she couldn’t wait to bite into his apple.

“These are Tessa and Sierra,” Tyler began, pointing to the girl next to him and the redhead next to Peter. “This is Ava.”

They both nodded their heads. Tessa turned to me and remarked, “I really like your shoes.” There was an uneasy quiet before she did.

The ice was broken after that, and the conversation started to flow. Even Sierra, who only had eyes for Peter, chatted to me. I was shocked that I felt at ease with them. I was laughing and cracking jokes, and when they went to get drinks, I ended up

buying a gin and tonic. I had never drunk anything other than a glass of wine with supper before, but I was having a good time.

I knew the small amount of alcohol I drank had affected my brain when I stood up without being prompted and dragged Peter out of his seat and away from the conversation he was having with Tyler.

I said, “Come on, let’s dance,” and I did a little shimmy and led Peter down the stairs to the dance floor. He merely grinned and did what I told him to do.

I took us to the middle of the dance floor, where there were other people dancing all around us. The music playing was one I didn’t recognize, but the beat was incredibly appealing.

Peter moved his hand away from mine and put both of his hands on my waist.

He leaned down and whispered in my ear, “I’m having fun.”

I shook my head; yes, and I really meant it.

Peter twisted me around so that my back was against his chest. His hands were still on my waist, and he put his head in the crook of my neck.

The way we were dancing didn’t seem very friendly, but I was having too much fun to notice. Peter proceeded to move us to the rhythm, and I don’t know what happened, but I started to grind back into him.

His hot breath on my neck made me feel like I wasn’t the girl who had trouble with her weight for one night. I was the girl out with a boyfriend, dancing the night away. Peter pressed himself closer to me, and I didn’t even know how it was possible because I was sure that not even air could get past us.

I felt Peter's lips on my neck, and I trembled. I hoped he believed it was because I was chilly and not because it felt so amazing.

Peter gently pulled me aside, and I was completely in the groove.

He enquired, "Do you want to go get something to drink?" and his voice sounded weird.

I felt a little rejected. When he thought I wasn't looking, I watched him straighten the front of his pants and grinned to myself. Maybe he wasn't really rejecting me.

I turned to face the bar and saw Peter directly behind me. This inebriated guy fell right in front of me when I was just a few feet from the bar.

"Hey, watch where you're going. What's with these fat chicks taking up space?" he murmured.

Before I knew it, Peter had shoved me aside and was striking the intoxicated guy in the face over and over again.

"Peter!" I screamed as Tyler came out of nowhere and grabbed him off the person who was now on the floor. Peter somehow managed to kick the guy in the stomach before Tyler pushed him towards me.

"Man, calm down," Tyler remarked. Peter turned to me and tugged my arm.

He said, "Let's go." "I'll talk to you later, Tyler," he added. I was still a little bewildered. One minute, I was dancing, and the next, I was in the thick of a fight. I wasn't even aware that Peter could hear the loud music.

He took us outside and to his car, then he slumped against it and slid to the ground. I

plopped down next to him on the ground without even thinking about what I was wearing.

When I looked up at his face, I remarked, “Oh, Peter, your lip is bleeding.”

He stroked it softly with his palm and growled. He held his head in his hand.

“I just wanted you to have fun. I can’t believe I ruined it,” he whispered into his palm.

I responded, “I didn’t even know you heard.” Then I pushed him with my shoulder and added, “It was so hot how you defended my honor in there.”

He glanced up and smiled, but then he recalled his lips. “I’m glad you think I’m hot. I just couldn’t help myself. I feel bad for what I did to you the first time we met now that I saw someone being mean to you.”

We sat still and listened to each other’s breathing. Who would have thought Peter would be such a kind person and a fantastic friend?

I said softly, “I’m glad I met you.”

“Not as happy as I am,” he added even more quietly.

Peter remarked, “I’ll see you on Monday,” as I shut the door to his automobile. I nodded yes and proceeded to the front door. I looked around and saw that he was still looking, so I waved before unlocking my front door and going inside.

I didn’t have to worry about getting in trouble for being home late since my parents were on a business trip. Even if they had been there, they wouldn’t have known what to do because I never went out and broke my curfew.

I didn't bother turning on any lights because I knew how to go about in the dark. I dragged myself up the stairs and into my room. I had a great time tonight, even though it didn't end on a good note. The talk I had with Peter beside his car was a nice touch. I didn't really like him in that sense, but I was about to jump over a steep precipice and didn't know what was on the other side. Even if I wanted to come back, I couldn't.

I went into my room and yawned while raising my hand. I was so sleepy. I turned back to switch on the lights in my room and shouted. Chloe was on my bed with her laptop.

"Hey you, how was your night?" she enquired.

I shouted, "How dare you try to talk to me normally after you scared me to death?" I put my hand over my heart and said, "You said you were leaving after I left. What are you doing here?"

"I chose to stay. So I ask again, how was your night? Did you have fun?" she said.

I merely shrugged and took off my clothing.

"It was fine."

"Come on, give a little," Chloe urged.

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I thought about whether or not to inform her about the argument and chose to do so. She would find out eventually, and if she heard it from someone other than me, she would be very angry.

“Not much; I met some of Peter’s friends, danced, Peter got into a fight with someone who called me a name, and I had a drink for the first time...”

“Wait, he got into a fight for you? Oh my gosh, aren’t you two just the cutest?” she replied.

“It’s not like that. We’re just friends. If you were in my shoes, you’d try to protect me, too,” I added as I turned out the light in my bedroom and walked to my bed after putting on a huge vest and shorts.

“Just go away. I want to sleep, and I can’t handle the Dr. Phil teenage love special you want to hit me with right now.”

Chloe giggled and did as I requested. She also turned off her laptop, which made the room completely black.

We were both quiet, but I could see Chloe wanted to say something. Just as I was going to encourage her to speak it before we both fell asleep, she murmured,

“Do you remember that song from when you were a kid?”

I said, “What?” and I could hear the laughing in her voice, so I knew that whatever she was about to say was going to be silly.

“I think it went something like Ava and Peter sitting on a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G. First came a fight in a bar, second came lo...” I put my hand over her lips to stop her from talking in a sing-song way.

“Stop, you could be so annoying when you want to be,” I replied with a giggle. “Now, be quiet, and let’s go to sleep.”

The room got quiet, and I moved my pillow so it was more comfortable beneath my head. I was about to fall asleep when a buzzing sound from under my pillow woke me up. I got up and peered under my pillow to notice that my phone was flashing. I responded sleepily without bothering to see who it was.

“Hey?”

“Hey, it’s me,” I heard Peter say on the phone.

I said, “I can honestly say that I’m surprised by this call,” and then I looked at the clock on my bedside table. It was half past one in the morning.

He chuckled a little and continued, “I know I just saw you about an hour ago, but I couldn’t sleep, so my fingers just dialed your number. Sorry if I woke you up.”

“Okay, so what do you want me to do about you not being able to sleep?” I asked him.

“Talk to me until I fall asleep,”

“Okay, what do you want to talk about?” I said.

“Let’s talk about you. What color do you like best?” he said.

“Blue, but not any blue. I love the blue in the sky; it’s so pretty. What about you?” I questioned him back.

Peter said, “What’s your favorite book of all time?” He said, “I don’t have a favorite color. Any color looks fine to me. I won’t say it’s because I’m a boy and not into girly stuff.”

“Pride and Prejudice is my favorite book ever. I love Mr. Isaac, my fictional crush. I’ve read both the play script and the book,” I remarked.

“Honestly, I did think of you as a classical girl. I saw the movie and remembered a line about an unmarried girl of a certain age needing a husband,” he added.

“Yeah, something like that,” I smiled because I understood what he was talking about, but his words were a little off.

“Hmmm, have I ever told you how much I like your voice?” he murmured, sounding a lot more sleepy than before.

After that, I didn’t say anything. After a time, I could hear Peter’s soft breathing on the phone, which meant he had gone asleep.

“Peter?” I said, even though I knew he was asleep.

I smiled a little, and then I put down the phone. I nestled into my pillow even more, feeling even more at ease and comfortable than I had been before Peter phoned. I was getting back asleep when I heard a small voice sing softly in the dark.

“Ava and Peter are sitting on a tree and kissing...”

“I knew you were trouble when you walked in; shame on me now,” I sang as I moved

towards the school door. It was Tuesday, the day following the party on Friday, and I was going to meet Peter outside by his vehicle for lunch, as I had been doing for the last month.

“Flew me to places I’d never been...” I stopped singing and got a bit tight as I felt a touch on my shoulder. I knew it was Peter without looking up.

He remarked to me, “Hey you, looking pretty today,” as he looked down at my white shirt with pink flowers on it, black slacks, and black flats.

I sighed and said, “Stop saying things like that. You don’t have to tell me what you think I want to hear. By the way, I was just on my way to meet you. You didn’t have to come inside to get me.”

Peter stopped walking and came to stand in front of me, putting both of his hands on my shoulders. He looked me in the eyes and said, “I don’t tell you you’re pretty because I think that’s what you want to hear. I tell you you’re pretty because I think you’re pretty, and I can’t help but tell you.”

I looked up at his face to see if he was simply lying to me, but the expression in his eyes was real. I shook my head and didn’t answer him. I didn’t know what to say because I wasn’t used to getting odd praises from guys. I said instead,

“Let’s go, I’m starving.”

“No, you know what, today we’re doing something a little different,” he remarked, turning me away from the school door and towards an unknown place.

When we got closer to the entrance that led to the school cafeteria, we found out where it was. I stopped suddenly and turned to look at him.

“I’m not going in there,” I responded, pointing at the door.

“Yes, you are. We’re having lunch here today,” he said.

“Look, you can’t make me go in there. I’m going to the library. If you want to join me for lunch, you know where to meet me,” I said back. How could I ever go in there with Peter? I couldn’t sit with his pals, who were well-known. I was sure they would make fun of me, and I also knew they would always be wondering what he was doing with someone like me. I was about to go to the library when he turned me around and said,

“Why are you such a coward? Why can’t you look at people and instead of your face saying, “Keep victimizing me,” make it say, “screw you, I don’t care what you think.”

I shoved my palm into his chest and yelled, “Screw you, Peter. You don’t know what it’s like to have people make fun of you all the time. Screw you!” I said it again and drove my finger into his chest.

“Look,” he said with a sigh, “I don’t want us to fight. I want to show you that it doesn’t matter what other people think of you; it’s if you have confidence in yourself. To do that, you need to stop hiding in the library and stop hiding with me when we go out to lunch. You need to go in there and face everyone with your head held high.”

Even though I was still a bit furious, I talked myself into it, and even though I didn’t want to acknowledge it, he was making some point. “Fine, but not until you say sorry for calling me a coward.”

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He knelt down and extended out his hand to me. "I'm sorry a thousand times for calling you a coward. Since I blessed your eyes upon you, you have become the fiercest, bravest girl I have ever met. Will you forgive me, my lady?"

I laughed and said, "Get up, you idiot. I forgive you." The fight from earlier was gone entirely. He stood up, smiled at me, and then walked to the cafeteria's door.

I grinned back at him nervously and said, "Let's do it."

When I opened the cafeteria door, I was met with the sound of noisy teenagers shouting, laughing, and yelling at each other. The only thing that calmed me down in this turmoil was Peter's presence next to me.

He put his hand on the small of my back and proceeded to lead me to the lunch line. I could feel people looking at me, and I wanted to hide in a corner. I didn't want to know what they were thinking, but I bet most of them were awful.

We stopped behind four other individuals who were also in line for lunch. The female in front of us had huge breasts and a very slim body.

She made me think of Mimi and Kiki from when Peter and I first met. What if he acted like a total jerk in front of this girl?

"Hey, just relax," Peter murmured in my ear, possibly because he could see I was nervous.

The girl in front of us turned around when she heard Peter's voice. She stared at me

like I was a disgusting insect that she wanted to squash with her high heels, but then she glanced at Peter, and her eyes brightened.

“Hey Evie, do you realize how long it’s been since I saw you in here? Blondie remarked with a pout, “You haven’t been sitting with us.”

“I’ve been busy, Brielle,” he said in a voice that sounded indifferent and not very pleasant. I was a little startled since I thought he would have dumped me by now.

“And who is she?” “Blondie, also known as Brielle, questioned, pointing at me.

Peter said, “Ava is a very special friend of mine.”

I don’t believe she liked that he called me his special buddy since she looked at me again and saw the empty tray in my hand.

“I see your tray is empty. Do you want me to get you an apple?” “You know how we girls have to eat healthy,” she replied with a sneer. It was her turn in line, so she offered Peter a flirtatious look before moving to the cafeteria woman. I felt Peter gently grip my arm and brushed off her comments.

I couldn’t believe how mean and spiteful some females were. What had I done to her? She didn’t even know me. I remembered what Peter said outside and came up with a plan. I smiled a bit, and when it was our turn to order, I made sure to get a big Coke in a cup.

“Not with my friends; we’ll sit over there,” he answered, pointing to a table a few spaces away from the one he typically sat at. I saw that we had to walk by the table where Brielle was sitting at the end.

We continued walking towards our table, and as we got close to Brielle, I feigned to

trip and spilled my coke all over her, ice and all.

I tried not to smile, and I could hear Peter coughing, probably to keep from laughing.

“Oh my gosh, I’m so sorry,” I said as I reached for a napkin on my tray. “Let me help you clean that.”

“Don’t touch me,” she said. “Peter, get your friend away from me.”

I acted like I was being scolded, and Peter and I went the last few yards to our table. This time, I knew I was walking with confidence and a “screw you” look on my face. We put our meal on the table and sat down.

We both glanced at each other and started laughing.

“You should have seen her face,”

We both commented, “Her face when the drink fell on her was priceless.”

“That was really nice. “That’s not what I expected when I told you to be confident, but I’m still proud of you for doing that,” he remarked with a smile.

I smiled back and replied, “Thanks.”

We fell into a nice stillness. I thought about how I wouldn’t have had the guts to do what I had just done if it weren’t for Peter.

I said in a casual tone, “You know, Peter, you’re kind of awesome.”

“No, you’re awesome,” he added with a wink.

I was lying on my bed reading Jane Eyre, which I had read many times before. Chloe was on the opposite end of the bed with her laptop, and we were both OK with simply being together without talking.

She had started to complain that I was doing too many things without her, so I asked her to come over and hang out with me for the day. I was now reading the portion of the novel when Jane started working for Mr. Rochester when Chloe put down her laptop and remarked,

“Sometimes you’re so dull. It’s Saturday, and you’re reading a book that came out nearly a hundred years ago. In around fifty years, I can absolutely picture you living in a house full of cats on a hill.

I said playfully, “If I didn’t love you so much, I’d be very angry.” “We can’t all be as outgoing and fun as you are.”

“Don’t let me stop you from reading,” she remarked in a childlike manner. “I can see you trying to steal a read while we’ve been talking.”

I smiled at her and then went back to my book. Mr. Rochester was such a dark character; he was definitely one of my fictional crushes. I was just getting back into the book when my phone rang. I knew it wasn’t my parents because they were in the house, and the only other person who would call was sitting across from me, so it had to be Peter who was calling me. I answered the phone on the third.

“Hey, Peter,” I said.

“Hey Ava, what are you doing?” he said.

I said, “Just hanging out with Chloe and reading a book.”

He laughed a little and then said, “Why am I not surprised? Chloe is the girl you’re always with, right?” “

“Yes,”

“Well, I realize this is pretty short notice, but Tyler brought a lot of people over to my place without asking me first, and now there’s a pool party going on. He asked, “Do you want to come over? If you want, you can bring your friend.”

I thought about it for a second. I was really enjoying my book, but I couldn’t help but feel like I should be out-living my life instead of being the future old lady with a house full of cats. I looked at Chloe and asked,

“What do you think about a pool party?” “

“Time and place, baby,” she said.

“Now and at Peter’s house,”

“Come on, let’s put on our itcy bitsy polka dot bikinis and go party,” she added.

“Hey, Peter,” I whispered into the phone. “I think I’ll come, and Chloe is coming with me.”

“Good, for a second, I thought you had hung up on me,” he said.

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Before I hung up, I got directions to his house. Chloe and I smiled at each other and then rushed to get ready. Chloe always came over to my house, so she had a swimsuit and other things there. She put on her bikini under her clothes, but since I wasn't comfortable wearing a swimsuit, I decided to wear my own when I got to Peter's house.

We both got dressed in under thirty minutes and after I told my parents I would be home before my curfew, Chloe and I were on our way.

We were there in 10 minutes because Peter lived nearby and in the same neighborhood as I did. We got out of Chloe's car and headed to the door. Before we could knock or ring the doorbell, Peter opened the door and stood there in blue and green swim trunks.

"Ava," he murmured, pulling me into an embrace, "You came."

I shook my head, yes, surprised by how kind he was. He stepped back and saw Chloe standing next to me.

"Hey, glad you could make it," he replied to her with a nod of his head, not as excited as he had been when he first saw me. I could tell Chloe had noticed, too, since she was giving me a sneaky look.

"Welcome to my humble abode," he said as he opened the door wide for Chloe and me to walk in. We were in a fancy foyer, and I could hear music, yelling, and water splashing in the rear.

He responded, “This way, ladies,” and led us closer to the music until we were standing in front of glass sliding doors that opened out to a gigantic pool. He peered at Chloe’s beach shorts and vest and then at my long pants and long-sleeved top.

“I can take off my vest out there; I’m already wearing my bikini,” Chloe replied.

“I need a room to change,” I responded, opting to wear my bikini after all.

“Follow me,” he urged to Chloe. “You can go out.”

I did what he requested and went up the stairs with him. He unlocked the first door on the left, which led to a bedroom.

“Go ahead; I’ll wait for you outside,” he said.

I immediately changed into a white bikini with pink polka dots and a pair of boy shorts that came just below my knees. I also donned a pink vest with thin straps. I came out and locked the door.

“Let’s go,” I said.

He glanced at me and said, “You can’t go down there like that.” You’re not going for a run around the block; there’s a pool party down there. “Take off those pants and vest.”

I stared down at the ground. I didn’t mind taking it off, but I just couldn’t feel comfortable revealing that much skin.

“I can’t,” I responded quietly.

“Yes, you can.” I told you that it doesn’t matter what other people think of you; what

matters is what you think of yourself. “he asked.”

I didn’t say anything.

“Hey, go back in there and take them off and come back out,” he said.

I don’t know what I was thinking, but instead of going into the room, I started to take off my clothes right in front of him. I could feel his eyes on me as I took off my shorts and then my vest. When I was done, I stood straight as his eyes roamed over me. After a while, I couldn’t take his wondering eyes anymore and put my hands over me to cover myself.

“Move them,” he murmured as he got closer to me. I moved my hands, and he started to look me over again. He got even closer, and I could feel his body heat coming off of him. He bent down and muttered in my ear,

“Don’t cover yourself up. You may not be flawless, but it’s your flaws that I find so beautiful. I wouldn’t want you to be any other way. “Come on, let’s go,” he urged.

I could feel my cheeks becoming hot. He may not realize it, but what he said made me feel incredibly wonderful. I let him take my hand and walk me down the steps till we were back in front of the glass sliding door.

He paused just before we could proceed to the party and said, “Are you ready?” “

“Sure, let’s have some fun,” I said.

When we walked in, I saw Chloe talking to two guys on the other side of the pool. She was a social butterfly by nature. She looked up and saw compliments on my outfit. I never wore my bikini without my usual vest and shorts.

“Come on, let’s go to where Tyler is,” he urged.

We moved over till I spotted Tyler’s blonde head dancing to the song Black and Yellow by Wiz Khalifa. He turned around when he heard us.

“Hey, Ava!” “Now I know where my boy went,” he yelled.

I chuckled and stood next to Peter as he talked. I thought about walking over to Chloe, but I didn’t want to interrupt her discussion, and I wasn’t ready to leave Peter’s side yet.

I didn’t realize Peter had stopped talking until he softly leaned on me.

“Do you want to go swimming?” he asked.

“No,” I answered.

He gave me a sneaky glance and asked, “Are you sure about that?” “

I shook my head yes, but I wasn’t quite ready to get in the water since it seemed like it was going to be frigid.

Peter picked me up off the ground like I was nothing and jumped into the water with me. The water was a little cold, and I felt myself being pulled up. I was in Peter’s arms and against his chest. I was a little upset about being thrown into the water, but I couldn’t help but like where I was.

“Geez, why do you have to be so annoying?” I muttered, pulling away from him and doing my best to seem angry.

He chuckled and grinned down at me and said, “I brought you here to have fun, not to

sit on the sidelines.” A man needs to do what a man has to do.

I stood in the water with my arms crossed, but when he kept smiling down at me, my scowl eventually changed into a grin.

Before he could put his hands up to protect himself, I buried both of my hands deep into the water and pulled them back up with a lot of power, which sent the water directly into Peter’s face.

“Come here,” he urged, chuckling. He wasn’t at all offended by what I had just done.

I swam away to get away from him, but he came up with me a minute later. We were outdoors embroiled in a major water fight, forgetting about everyone else. After about forty-five minutes of playing in the pool, I started to feel thirsty.

“Hey, can I have a drink?” “Yes,” I said.

“Sure,” he responded as he swam to the edge of the pool and got out. He bent down and helped me get out of the water.

We went back through the sliding door, and I followed him into a kitchen that looked quite modern.

“Water?” he said.

He opened the door and retrieved a bottle of water when I shook my head yes.

“Are you having a good time?” “he said.

“Yes, but please don’t ever throw me in the water again,” I said, laughing and moving closer to him. I slapped him on the chest, which was bare. He looked down at my

hands on him and then back at me. He started to walk towards me until my back hit the kitchen counter, which I hadn't even noticed was there before.

He put the bottle down and put his hands on either side of me, trapping me. He kept staring at me, and then he dropped his head, and I felt a jolt as his soft lips met mine. At first, I didn't know what to do, but then I leaned into the kiss and kissed him back.

He moved one hand from my side to my cheek and tilted my head so he could kiss me more deeply. As he made the kiss softer but a little more forceful, my heart raced. I lost myself and threw both of my hands around his neck and pushed them into his hair, trying to get closer to him than I had ever been to anyone else.

I don't know how it occurred, but I was kissing Peter in his kitchen, and it was the best thing that had ever happened to me.

I had never been kissed so deeply before. Peter kissed me like he was thirsty, and I was his first taste of water in years. He kissed me one final time tenderly on the lips before pulling away. He whispered with eyes that seemed a little hazy,

“Wow, I'd say I'm sorry for that, but I really, really liked it.”

He put his hands on each side of me on the kitchen counter again. I was embarrassed not just because of what he said but also because he was so near to me. I thought about the kiss and realized that I liked it too, so I decided to say it.

“I liked it too; I really liked it,” I added.

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He turned to look at me, and I could tell he was trying not to laugh. He seemed to have lost the struggle inside him because he put his hand on his stomach and bent over in laughter.

I started to feel very lost, like a child who had lost her mother in a room full of strangers and didn't know how to get back to her. This was supposed to be a special time for Peter and me. Usually, this was when the guy would confess his undying love, not when he looked like he had been watching reruns of comedy shows all weekend.

Peter glanced up and exclaimed, "Do you really think I would like someone like you or that I would kiss you and enjoy it?" in between fits of laughing. "Fat girl, this was all a game, and you fell for all my tricks."

His face twisted into a nasty sneer, and I felt my heart tighten. How could he be so mean? I wanted to curl up into a ball and cry for the rest of my life. My legs gave out, and I fell to the floor.

Peter started laughing again, this time while pointing at me. Tyler showed up out of nowhere and grinned when he spotted me on the ground.

"Did you really think he could like a girl like you or that I would let my friend date someone like you?" he asked, and then he laughed and pointed at me with Peter. I started to cry, and I was in a lot of emotional anguish. Just when I thought this was the worst of it, Chloe showed up and said,

"Get off the floor and stop looking like a pig. You should have known he would

never go for a girl like you when he could have a girl like me.”

Then they all stood around me on the ground as Peter chanted,

“I could never like a girl like you.”

“He could never like a girl like you,” Chloe and Tyler chanted.

I heard someone shout, “Ava, wake up,” from far away. My body shook, and I imagined the ground was opening up to end my profound shame and misery.

I sprang out of bed and glanced around. My heart was still racing from the dream. Even though the anguish from a minute earlier had turned out to be just a dream, I could still feel part of it.

When I glanced at Chloe, who had her hand on my shoulder, I realized that the voice I had heard and the shaking of the ground had been her attempt to wake me up. I drew away from her because I was still a bit scared of my dream. She scowled at me and questioned,

“What’s the matter? I observed you moving around a lot and talking in your sleep. Are you OK? “

“I just had a bad dream; I’m fine,” I answered, backing away as she tried to touch me again.

“Why are you pulling away from me if you’re so fine? Did I do something wrong?” she requested again, reaching out to touch me. This time, I let her.

I let out a sigh and then told her what I had dreamed about, from getting the invite to the party to the three of them laughing at me while I wept on the floor.

“I did warn you that you would end up becoming an elderly lady in a house full of cats, but then you went back to reading your book, and I was on my laptop all day until we both fell asleep,” she added. “About your dream, first of all, you should know that I would never do that to you. You might not realize this, but I think you’re the best buddy I’ll ever have, and you mean a lot to me. I don’t kick you down; I lift you up.

“Second, I can’t really speak for Peter, but I don’t think he would do that to you. You didn’t know how he was before you met him since you didn’t even know he was real, but he has changed a lot. He used to smoke all the time and be with a different female almost every week, sometimes every day. I can’t remember the last time I saw him with a female or a cigarette. It’s like you two are in a stable relationship since he involves you in everything, and you have lunch together every day, she said.

I thought about what she had just said to me, and deep down, I knew that Chloe would never do anything so cruel and hurtful to me. She had been with me through all the ups and downs of my life and had picked me up when I was down, but Peter was a whole different story. Even though I had forgiven him after that party, I couldn’t forget it; as they say, “once bitten, twice shy.”

“I know you would never do that, so let’s forget about that dream. But I think I should start to stay away from Peter,” I said to Chloe.

“Why?” “Why?” she questioned.

“I know you would never do that to me in real life, but I can’t say the same about Peter. I would hate to feel that way in real life since it was so heartbreaking in the dream. “I said it could be ten times worse.”

“Look, I can tell there’s nothing I can do to help him. You have to believe it for yourself.” “Come on, let’s go,” she urged as she pulled me from the bed.

I didn't know where she was going, but I trusted her. We strolled out of the room, down the stairs, and around and around until we were at the door to my kitchen, all without turning on any lights. That shows how well she knew my house.

She turned on the light and walked over to the fridge. I tried not to think about the whole kitchen scenario in my dream; I was trying to put it behind me and forget about it.

"I found it," I heard Chloe say.

She turned around and closed the fridge door with her foot. She had a box of milk in one hand and a pack of double chocolate Oreo cookies in the other. She put the cookies on the counter and then went to the cabinets. She came back with two glasses and a plate and put them on the counter as well.

She immediately filled the two glasses with milk and put six Oreos on each side of the platter, for a total of twelve.

"Come sit down," she said, taking a chair out from under the counter and sitting down. I pulled the chair out and sat across from her.

I smiled at her and added, "I remember when we were kids, and your mom would do this for us when we had bad dreams."

"I know that's why I'm doing this. I know you need it," she said.

We didn't say anything, but we dipped our cookies into the glass of milk every now and again. It made me feel better, and I'm pleased Chloe was here tonight.

"Thanks for this," I said.

“Not a problem. I know I’ve said this before, but you’re my best friend, and I’d do anything for you. “We’re not just friends; we’re sisters,” she added, glancing at something behind me. “And at three in the morning, I’m saying I love you, sister.”

“I love you too,” I murmured as I leaned down to hug her.

“Oh, we’re having a sentimental moment.” Where is the camera? We both laughed out loud when she stated it.

As soon as Mrs. Archer saw me walk into the library, she exclaimed, “Ava, what brings you back to our humble presence here?” She was seated behind the desk, and all I could see was her well-pressed white blouse and red hair pushed back in a perfect bun.

I grinned and walked up to her. I bent my body over the counter and gave her a long, strong embrace. It had been more than a month since I had been here, which was when I started talking to Peter.

Peter, I didn’t even want to think about him. He phoned my phone 10 times between yesterday morning and today, and I didn’t answer any of them.

“Hey Scot, you know how much I appreciate you being here,” I remarked with a smile.

She added, “It’s Mrs. Archer to you, and you know you’re not supposed to lean over the counter; it’s against library rules.” She tried to keep a straight face but failed because she smiled back at me. I swear she was a really nice lady for someone who was fourteen years older than me.

I walked around to the door that led to the back and went into the small room behind the counter where Mrs. Archer was sitting. I sat down next to her.

“Where have you been, young lady?” Mrs. Archer remarked, “I looked for you every day, but you never came.”

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“Oh my gosh, I’m so sorry. “I’ve been busy, but I’m not busy anymore,” I said.

“You’ve been busy for a month and a half or so. “Don’t ever do that again. I missed you.”

I laughed again, and in a few minutes, we were conversing as we had for the last three years and more than I had been in high school.

When the door to the library opened, Mrs. Archer was acting out something that had happened with her husband, who was sexy for an older guy. I looked up because I knew that not many students came here, let alone at lunch. My eyes widened when I saw it was Peter walking towards me.

“Hey Ava, I went outside to wait, but when you didn’t show up after ten minutes, I thought you would be in here.” What is going on? “he questioned, and even though his voice sounded normal, I could tell he was angry because of the twitch on the side of his left jaw.

I saw Mrs. Archer staring back and forth between Peter and me with great curiosity. I got up from my chair and said, “I’ll be right back, Scot. I have to take care of this.”

I came out from behind the store and moved over to Peter. I grabbed his shirt sleeve and dragged him till we were standing just in front of the library door.

“I’m sorry, but I can’t go out for lunch with you anymore. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you sooner so you wouldn’t have had to come looking for me,” I added.

I noticed his forehead pucker up in perplexity before he asked me, “Why can’t you?” Did I do something that made you mad? “I’m sorry for whatever it is, and I won’t do it again.”

I didn’t expect this would be so hard.

“You didn’t do anything wrong.” “I’ve been doing a lot of thinking, and I’ve decided that we need to end this thing we have going on,” I stated.

“Is this why you haven’t picked up the phone? “I still don’t get what happened. Everything was fine until Friday,” he said.

“Please, don’t attempt to figure this out, OK? I responded, “I have to go, bye,” and turned to go. He grabbed my arm.

“Wait...” he interrupted. Before he could say anything further, Mrs. Archer popped her head out of the library door and added,

“Is everything OK, Ava?”

“Yeah, he was just leaving,” I responded, pushing away from him and without looking back as I went back into the library with Mrs. Archer.

Mrs. Archer said, “What was that about?” as soon as we sat down where we had been before Peter came in. “

“I said, “Oh, that was nothing.”

“Is he the reason you missed over a month and a half of our normal lunch dates?” she said, asking a different question.

“Yeah,” I responded, shaking my head.

“Do you want to talk about it? I’m all ears.” “She asked.

I said, “No.”

“All right, anytime you’re ready. I didn’t get your normal salad since I didn’t know you would be coming back. “I would give you a piece of my sandwich, but I know you wouldn’t take it,” she added.

“No, give me a piece,” I responded.

“But it has fattening things in it,” she continued, knowing that I was having trouble with my weight and that I usually ate items that weren’t very tasty and didn’t make me gain weight.

“Forget that; it doesn’t matter if I gain weight as long as I’m happy with myself,” I said.

She grinned at me and said, “I like the sound of that.”

“Me too,” I answered as I took the half of her sandwich that she gave me.

As I left the library, I said goodbye to Mrs. Archer. I had a great time, and it reminded me of why I liked her so much. I pushed through the library doors and hurried out to get to my next class. But when I saw Peter on the ground leaning against the wall on the other side of the library entrance, all of that went out of my mind. He looked like he had been sitting there the whole time I was in the library, waiting for me to come out.

He stood up and walked towards me, getting in the way of my exit.

“I know you said what you had to say, and I respect your choices, but I won’t feel good about myself if I don’t know why you’re doing this and I just let you walk away,” he stated.

“Please let me go. I don’t have to explain myself or my actions to you,” I pleaded.

He took a step closer, making it harder for me to get away, so I decided to simply say what I had to say and be done with it.

“Hey, you just became my buddy out of the blue, and I don’t really know what you want from me. You might not know, or you could be pretending not to know, but I know that if I keep being friends with you, you’re going to hurt me at some point. I also know that your opinion and perspective matter so much to me that when you ultimately bring me down, I don’t know how I’ll get back up. I let out a breath I didn’t realize I was holding as I spoke.

“Isn’t our friendship worth anything to you? Are you going to let your fears about yourself affect how you see me? Do you know how much I love you and how hard I strive to never hurt you?” he asked.

“That’s the problem; I don’t know how much you care about me. I said, “For all I know, you don’t care at all, and because of that, I think it’s time to call what we had a good thing while it lasted; this friendship is over.”

He answered in a calm, dispassionate voice, “There is nothing I could say to defend myself against whatever charge you have laid against me.”

“Nothing,” I responded just as gently. He stepped aside so I could pass, and I ran down the hall. My chest wrenched, and my eyes burned. If this was the correct thing to do, why did it feel so wrong?

Have you ever done something you believed was right but then felt bad about the way it made you feel?

I knew that feeling well. For the next two weeks after I ran into Peter in the hall, I kept questioning the choices I had made. To make matters worse, Chloe, who was always on my side, told me again that she didn't agree with my choices.

I asked myself three questions that I didn't like the answers to since they made me feel stupid: Am I a coward?

Am I really going to allow a silly dream, no matter how terrible it was, to tell me what to do?

Wasn't there an ancient saying that said it was better to have loved and lost than to have never loved at all?

The last phrase might not apply, but I know you realize what I mean. This last week was especially hard since I kept seeing Peter all over school, and I missed talking to him every day.

To make matters worse, I spotted Chloe chatting to him not once but twice before history class. Both times they noticed me, they shut up. This was strange because Chloe and Peter had never really talked before, but suddenly they were secret friends.

By Friday, I had diagnosed myself with depression, and Cymbalta wasn't the answer; Peter Arthur was. The only problem was that I wasn't sure if I had enough confidence to go up to him and tell him I had made a mistake and that our friendship deserved a chance. Chloe had left me in the last ten minutes, so I walked to my history class.

I turned the corner, and what I saw made me furious. Chloe and Peter were talking outside the classroom. I hurried my step, and when they heard me coming, they broke

up, and Peter said something that sounded like “later” before heading inside the class.

I went into the class behind her, and as soon as we sat down next to one other, I enquired, “What was that all about out there?” “

“What?” She asked, trying to seem like she didn’t know what was going on but failing terribly.

She saw that I wasn’t going for her little act because I raised my eyebrow. She sighed and added, “It’s nothing to worry about; I’m just catching up with an old friend.”

I didn’t even bother to react to what I thought was a foolish, full-of-bull remark. I had a sense something was wrong. She leaned over and grabbed my shoulder. I didn’t feel better, but I did feel better.

“Listen, I know you’ve been under a lot of stress lately, so I’ve made the decision for both of us that we’re going to a party tonight,” Chloe remarked after a minute of silence.

I said, “No.”

“To me, you could be an alien.” She replied, “I’m coming over this afternoon, and we’ll get ready together to have fun and get you out of your sad state of affairs.”

I didn’t even try to say no again. I knew it wouldn’t matter; she had already made up her mind, and I would be going to that party tonight, whether I wanted to or not.

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“Stop it,” Chloe replied, pushing my hand away from my skirt. “You look fine.”

I had on a black skirt with a high waist, a bright pink t-shirt that fit snugly and was tucked into the skirt, and high black wedge shoes.

“I know I look good,” I said.

Chloe gave me an odd look and then remarked with a smile, “I’m so glad to see that you’re not as hard on yourself as you used to be.” I know you still have some doubts, but I enjoy that you don’t argue with me as much when I commend you.

“Thanks, and I think I lost some weight.” “I even added a comment that praised myself,” I said.

“Come on, let’s go party,” she said, putting her arm over my shoulder and pulling me to the music coming from the home. The Saturdays’ “Higher” was booming from the speakers when we got there.

“Oh, I love this song,” I remarked, shaking my hips a little.

“While you enjoy this song, I’m going to get us some drinks,” Chloe added with a giggle.

I nodded my head and joined the crowd on the improvised dance floor, moving my hips. When the first song ended, another one started, but I didn’t want to dance to this one. I glanced around for Chloe but couldn’t find her. Why did I feel like I had been there before?

I waited a while for Chloe, and then I went to the backyard, where I saw two swings. When I got closer to the swings, I saw that there was already someone there. As I got even closer, I could see the back of Peter's head. I stopped and thought about whether or not I should go up to him. Without thinking about it anymore, I walked the last few steps to the empty swing next to the one Peter was sitting on and gently pushed it forward with my feet.

"Is it OK if I sit here?" "I enquired softly.

"Of course, you can sit wherever you want," he said.

I sat down, but it was still silent since Peter didn't say anything. I knew he was waiting for me to say something, but I didn't know how to start.

"You're probably wondering why I'm here," I said with a sigh. "I want to say I'm sorry for what happened outside the library. In the last two weeks that we haven't talked, I've had a lot of time to think, and I've realized that I was a coward and an idiot for letting my personal problems get in the way of our relationship. You don't have to forgive me, but I want you to know that I'm tired of allowing self-doubt to get in the way. I genuinely want to give this friendship we had another shot.

Peter still didn't say anything, and just when I thought he was about to go, he added gently, "Don't ever do that again." Never leave me without telling me why.

He was quiet again, then he turned to me, grasped my face, and stated in a hard voice, "I've missed you so much these last few weeks." Ava, I don't want to be simply your buddy. I want to be a lot more than that. "I want to be your best friend, your boyfriend, and everything else."

I held my breath and felt my heart race as he spoke. Did I want those things, too? Yes, I really did.

I shook my head and answered, “Yes, yes to everything.”

“I want to say I love you, but I’m not quite there yet. I’m very close to that feeling.”

“Right now, just know that I like you more than I’ve ever liked anyone else. In the very near future, you’ll be the love of my life,” he stated.

I knew exactly how he felt, so to indicate that I felt the same way, I threw myself at him and kissed him.

His lips were so soft, and it felt much better than it had in my dream. At first, he was surprised, but within seconds, he was kissing me back.

I did not anticipate the night to go this way at all. It was going a lot better than I had thought it would.

Peter grasped the back of my neck and drew me closer while putting his hand around my waist. He bit my bottom lip and pulled, and I swear I felt myself tremble. The boy could kiss.

We kept kissing on the swings until I broke away to gather my breath and murmured, “I think I like you too.”

Peter laughed a little and then crushed his lips back on mine.

Peter’s point of view

Three Months After

I went through the swarm of kids at our school’s annual book sale. I knew books were smart, and my girlfriend loved to read, but I never understood why they were so popular.

I was drawn to the girl standing a few steps in front of me. I could see her hand moving and her hair swaying as she chatted with her best friend, who was behind a kiosk selling used books.

When I got closer, I heard her exclaim, “This is crazy.” You can’t get \$15 for a secondhand copy of *Wuthering Heights*. What are you doing at the book sale? You don’t even like to read. “

“Please calm down, ma’am. I’m only doing my job. “Don’t get mad at the sales clerk,” I heard Chloe say, and from where I was, I could see her trying not to smile.

I couldn’t see Ava’s face, but I could see that the back of her neck was getting red with fury. I didn’t want things to get out of hand, so I moved the last few steps to her and threw my arms around her waist.

“Hey baby, happy birthday,” I replied, kissing her neck.

She turned to face me, stood on her toes, and kissed me. I grabbed the back of her neck and wrapped my arm around her waist, pulling her off the ground and closer to my face. We’ve been doing this a lot for the last three months, and I swear it never got old with her.

I pushed my tongue into her lips, and she gasped and shoved her hands into my hair, bringing our bodies even closer together.

“Ehmm, I’m sorry to interrupt this little love nest, but I have to sadly tell you that there are no bedrooms available,” Chloe remarked from behind us. “The other students and I would really appreciate it if you stopped this great display of public affection.”

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We let go of one other, and I carefully put Ava down on the floor. Her breathing was a little off, and her cheeks were a nice shade of pink. I looked down at her with a sense of contentment.

I looked at Chloe and remarked, “Hey, Chloe, I didn’t know you liked books.” “

“I’m not. “Miss Bennett asked me to help, so I thought, ‘Why not?’” she said.

“Peter, don’t talk to her.” “She hasn’t given me a birthday present yet, and just a minute ago, she was trying to steal my money,” Ava said.

Chloe smiled and threw a book at her. “You’re so emotional; you know I was just playing. Here, have the book for free.” “By the way, I did give you a present; I hugged you this morning and told you a happy birthday.”

I added, “Sorry to break up this little fight, but I have to take my girlfriend somewhere.”

Chloe exclaimed, “Oh my gosh, I could feel the mushy stuff coming on.”

“Shut up,” Ava responded with a giggle. “She’s just scared that she might be the one living alone in a house full of cats instead of me.”

I tugged Ava’s arm because I could tell that another small fight was about to commence.

“Let’s go,” I murmured. “Goodbye, Chloe.”

Ava said goodbye, too, and then I led her back to my vehicle. I opened the door for her to get in, then I walked around to the driver's side and got in. I moved to the back seat and pulled out the bouquet of yellow daffodils I had bought for her.

"Here," I murmured as I gave them to her.

"Oh, you remembered my favorite flowers," she said with a big smile.

"Yeah," I answered, scratching the back of my neck nervously. "By the way, you look very pretty."

I gazed down at her flowery skirt, which stopped halfway down her thigh, and her white-fitting tank top and white wedge shoes.

"Thanks, babe," she responded. "By the way, where are we going?" "

"You'll see."

I said, "Step up one more time," and then I stepped up into the gazebo and added, "No peeking."

I took my hands off her eyes when we were both on the same level on the gazebo.

"Do you like it?" "I said."

I noticed her look at the dinner table, which had two seats on each side and two candles on it. There were also miniature lights hanging all over the gazebo to make it more romantic.

I added, "You're thinking I'm a total wimp," when she didn't say anything.

"No, I think having a boyfriend like you has exceeded my expectations, and I love

this,” she said.

She got closer and looked at the empty vase in the middle of the table that had water in it.

“Is this where I put my flowers?” “She questioned, glancing back at me.

I shook my head and watched her put the flowers she had been holding a minute earlier into the vase.

I stepped over and pulled out a chair for her to sit on. “Have a seat,” I said.

She sat down, and once I pushed her chair in, I came over and sat down, too. I looked down at the table, which I had previously prepared with food and chilled wine. I had paid Tyler a lot of money to do this while I drove Ava over here.

“Let me give you your gift before we eat,” I said.

I took a Tiffany’s box out of my pocket and put it on the table.

“Open it,” I told her to do.

She opened the package slowly and gasped.

“Oh my God, this is so pretty, Peter.” She pulled a gold chain with one side of a shattered heart on it out of the box and remarked, “I love it.”

“Flip it over,” I replied.

She flipped it over, and I watched her read the inscription I had put there: “Peter’s Girl.”

I took out a necklace that was the other half of hers from my shirt. I flipped it over and walked closer so she could see the inscription on mine: Ava's Guy.

"Look, I have the other half," I said.

"This is so sweet, I might cry." "I love you so much," she said.

"No, I love you more," I murmured as I moved in to kiss her.

The End