

In Fate's Hands

Remind me again why I decided to come to this stupid end-of-summer party? Oh yeah, I forgot. The guy I'm in love with is here. But now I'm wondering... would it have made my life easier to stay in the comfort of my own room or come here and watch him smooch with Charlotte? I don't know anymore.

Sometimes I really do hate her. It should have been me who came here with Riley. It should have been me dancing with him three months ago. Three months. That's how long they've been together. That's how long I've watched them live happily ever after in their magic kingdom, while I'm their little Joker on the sidelines. I'm not kidding when I say he was supposed to dance with me at the dance at the end of the year. This is exactly what happened:

Riley's original date was Elizabeth. They had been on about one date before the dance. Elizabeth is a snob. Everyone knows that. She found some other guy and dumped Riley in the middle of the dance. Riley and I were okay friends. We had talked a few times. And so I decided to cheer him up. That's when I started liking him. Up close, he was so beautiful in every way and his eyes were so blue, his hair so perfectly dark and luscious. What's a girl to do? We were connecting. Things were working out perfectly. He ignored other people and just focused on me. I asked him to go get us some punch just to get myself together before he came back. But he seemed to be taking a while. So I went to check on him. And guess who he was dancing with? Charlotte Gardner. I knew I didn't have a chance at this point. She was beautiful and had the perfect body. And what kind of guy could resist those dance moves? And Charlotte always got what she wanted. Riley wasn't going to turn back to me now. Never.

And now it's been three months of misery for me. What does she have? Why can't I have it?

I throw ball after ball in the bowling alley, replaying the end-of-school dance over and over in my mind and pretending each pin is Charlotte. I think about how I cried that night. Usually, I'm not someone to be jealous... but I guess I am. I am jealous. And I feel I have the right to be jealous. And angry. Would it be fair if I took him back tonight? I deserve him, right? No, this is different. They're serious now. We were just talking back then. They're going out. I don't even think either one of them has noticed me tonight. That's how into each other they are. But they shouldn't be, technically. She took him. He's rightfully mine. Maybe it would be fair...

Knowing this wouldn't be the right thing to do, I quickly erase the thought from my mind and pitch another ball into the lane. For the first time tonight, I pay attention to my points. One-hundred fifty. I haven't even noticed. I decide I should take a break before I get too mad and knock someone's head off with a ball. I grab a soda and just sit down with my friend, Faiz. He is unmistakably drunk out of his mind. And Faiz doesn't drink much.

"Where'd you get alcohol?" I ask.

“Dexter.”

“Of course. He sure knows how to bring a party to life. “

“You should have a drink, Heather. You seem tense.”

“Yeah, a little. Where is he?”

“Seventh lane,” he replies, banging his head on the table. I grab a beer from Dexter, the school’s hustler who get and sell anything you ask for, who gives it to me for free. As I walk back to my table with Faiz, I pass the fifth lane, where I see the “royal couple” happily kissing. I can feel my grip tightening around the bottle, my face turning into a raspberry. I want to scream. But instead, I coolly take a sip of beer.

When I arrive at the table, Faiz is drooling all over it and I can smell alcohol on his breath as he snores. Gross. I buy a candy bar for later and find another table with some random people I barely know. My friend, Taryn, was supposed to be here, but she doesn’t exactly like to get out much. Plus, she’s in love with Faiz and was too nervous to come. Taryn’s pretty. She really is. But she doesn’t trust herself not to screw things up with a boy. Especially if Charlotte’s there. Then there’s really no hope.

As I get drowsier and drowsier, I wonder where Dexter got this stuff. It’s exceptionally strong. I can no longer feel my legs and my head seems as if it could explode at any second. I slowly start to grow unconscious. Awake, but not conscious. I have no idea what I’m doing. But I do notice one thing. Riley and Charlotte are sitting at the table across from me. Sharing ice cream. That’s when I realize how sick I am of Charlotte. I get another beer to calm down a bit, but nothing really works. Riley was mine three months ago, and he still is.

I stand up from the table. I can vaguely here people telling me to sit back down and relax, but I don’t listen. I keep walking towards the table where Riley and Charlotte are sitting. The room is spinning. I can’t tell reality from hallucinations anymore. Is Abraham Lincoln really tugging on my arm and telling me to sit down, or did Taryn finally show up? Am I a bowling pin or am I still myself? I don’t know. But I have a mission and I don’t stop until I get to the other table.

“You stole him from me”, I say to Charlotte, who is confused and disgusted at the same time.

“Riley, what is she talking about? What does she mean ‘I stole you’?” I can hear Charlotte asking.

“She means...nothing. She’s just drunk,” replies Riley, nervously.

“We were going to dance...and then you stole him. He talked to me first. And I bet you knew that. You think you’re so pretty and perfect with your stupid dance moves and your wavy hair. Well, I’ve got news for you, chick. He was mine then, and he’s mine now.”

I can hear gasps from the crowd that has now surrounded the three of us.

“Heather, stop talking. You’re drunk. Just shut up, alright?” Riley says, almost in a whisper. I refuse to listen to him. I feel indestructible. No one can bring me down. There’s so much going on in my head. I don’t know what I’m doing or why. Taryn (or Abe Lincoln, I’m still not completely sure) is still next to me, asking if I want to go home. I ignore it. The couple is just beginning to get up from their chairs when I lean over and kiss Riley. Right on the lips. With everyone watching. The next thing I know, Taryn and someone else are half-dragging me to Taryn’s car. After someone buckles my seatbelt, I black out.

When I wake up, my little sister is next to me in bed, and my cat is at my feet, purring and licking his paws. Seems like a normal morning. But something’s not right. I know something must have happened at that party. Something...unpleasant. Just as I start to get out of bed, I taste something odd in my mouth. Something unfamiliar. I’ve had it before in my life, but not this much. I ponder on the thought for a moment. It’s beer. That’s when it all comes back to me. The party replays in my head and fast forwards to the moment I kissed Riley. I can’t remember a thing after that. Someone must have brought me home. And to top off all this madness, today is the first day of school. I’ll bet everyone remembers. Everyone who wasn’t drunker than me remembers. I want to hide under my covers forever and never come out. Maybe I can play sick. Or go to school and pretend I was so drunk last night that I don’t even remember what happened. But I kissed Charlotte’s boyfriend. I feel like I owe her something, even though she was the person who completely ruined the summer after junior year for me. I was delusional. I had no right to kiss him, really. But at the moment, I felt like I had every right.

When I arrive at school I can just feel every pair of eyes piercing through me. Their gazes are intense. When I walk into a room, the room without doubt gets quieter. On my way to third period, Taryn greets me.

“I’m surprised you’re even talking to me,” I say. “Aren’t you afraid to be seen with the drunk?”

“If she’s my best friend...no. So. You remember, huh?”

“Who could forget? I was the highlight of the night.”

“It’s not that bad, you know. It could be worse. Morgan fell into the end of the bowling lane when he was drunk. Some guys had to pull him out.”

“Not even close to how humiliated I was. Taryn, do you think I kind of...owe her something? For kissing her boyfriend?”

“An apology, maybe. But for the most part, I say you guys are even. She did take him first, after all.”

I think about what Taryn said all class long. I can't decide whether or not she's right.

At lunch, Charlotte won't look at me at all. Not that she ever looked at me before, but now she acts like I'm not there. He hits me in the face with a door, she spills milk on my pants by “accident” and doesn't say anything, and when we were partnered in chemistry, she didn't work with me at all. But I deserve it. Completely. At the end of school, when I'm about to get in my car and drive home, Riley comes up to me. I wait for the insults, the yelling, and the demand for me to stay away from him, but it doesn't come.

“I'm sorry...,” I begin.

“That's a start,” he replies. “But I'm here to apologize to you. Look, I really liked you. All last year. Before the dance, before everything.”

“Since when?”

“Try...eighth grade.”

“What? I didn't...”

“Yeah, I didn't want you to know. Because I knew I'd screw things up. I didn't think someone as attractive, and smart, and funny as you would even look at me. I had no confidence. But that night at the dance...you made me believe in myself. I could tell you liked me. And so, I got a little drunk when Dexter spiked the punch. And I started dancing with Charlotte. She was so...perfect. And she didn't turn me down. She was so easy. You were more than that. More than I could handle. So, I went for her.”

“You started dancing with her? And all this time—“

“Yeah, I know. Listen, Charlotte's not a bad person. It was my fault. She still doesn't even know what you were talking about last night. Because she didn't steal me. I threw myself at her. But now, I can't change things for you. We're serious. I want her to go to college with me. But, we can still be friends. I promise you that.”

I can feel my eyes burning. Tear after tear drops down my face as I take in what Riley has just told me. It's not Charlotte's fault. It never was. She's innocent. Riley wipes away the tears on my face and gently kisses my forehead before walking away.

It was no one's fault. Charlotte was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. If she hadn't been at the punch table at the same time as Riley, and Dexter hadn't spiked the punch, Riley would have tried a little harder to get me. And I wouldn't be crying right now. Now I understand. Things just don't work the way you want them to sometimes. Fate has a mind of its

own. What happened at that dance...that was just what fate decided for me. And there's really nothing I can do about it.