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10/20/2022
English 2, C Band

Lavender Rings

I stared at the floor. My eyes weren't focused anywhere, just staring. I gently passed the lavender ring that Jules had given me on my necklace from finger to finger.

"Meg?" Said a voice. I glanced up. The voice came from Jules. They stood next to me reaching out a hand to help me off the floor. I took it and stood up. They pulled me into their arms giving me a tight hug. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine."

"Okay," they sighed, clearly seeing through my lies, "Let me know if you need anything."

I nodded back at them, my face was void of any emotion as I pulled away from their arms,

"I need to go." I whispered. I left before Jules could even respond.

The bus was crowded with people, all in business attire. The womens' heels clicked as they moved to seats and the mens' loafers all stomped. My boots seemed to stand out. I finally got to the office, gently pulling the heavy doors open. I walked to the elevator with each step I took echoing down the halls. When I got to the elevator, I was painfully aware of the other footsteps coming down the hall, which seemed too quiet as each step boomed. The owner of the footsteps finally got to the elevator. I took one look and remembered him.

"Meg? Is that you?" he asked. His eyes seemed to pour into my skin making me feel open and vulnerable.

“Max! How have you been?” My voice was filled with fake joy. He kept talking but I couldn't listen. All I could think about was what he did to my friends. Max had reported my friend's, Ella and April's relationship. Nobody had seen them since.

“Anyway, how have you been? Still pretty busy with work I assume?”

“Um... yeah. I actually just got promoted. I'm going to be the project manager for the Myers project.”

“Oh really? I'm working on that too.” My head filled with panic as he continued to talk. *That's the one good thing about Max, I thought, he can always keep talking.*

We got off the elevator. “Well it's great to hear we'll be working together again, Meg.”

“Yeah, it's nice to have a familiar face on the team.” I moved as fast as I could to my new office. I pulled my laptop out and checked my phone. There was one text from Jules, “Have a good day. Love you”

“So,” Max said walking into my office, “what would you think about a meeting in 5?” I was so startled I threw my phone into the air. It landed right near his foot.

“Sorry, you just startled me there,” I said. He chuckled, reaching down and picking up the phone.

“Well good news, it's not cracked,” I smiled.

“But who's this Jules?” My heart started racing as he set the phone down on my desk. He couldn't know. If he knew he'd tell someone. My hand reached for my ring necklace again. I started to play with it nervously.

“Just a friend. She's my roommate.” I had told this lie so many times but it didn't even begin to seem real.

“Oh, good. I thought for a second... you know...”

“Ha, yeah.” I cut him off before he could finish his thought. “You mentioned that meeting?”

“Yeah, in 5 minutes. Just to meet the team.”

“Sure, I’ll send out a note!” I said as he smiled and left the room.

“Alright everyone,” I shouted out at the chattering group. “it was great meeting all of you. I’m sure we’re all going to work really well together.” I paused for a moment. “It’s 5 o’clock, you’re all welcome to leave.”

The group started to gather their things. of course, Max popped his head up. “I don’t know about anyone else, but I’d be interested in going to grab some dinner,” he said hopefully. I glanced around the room hoping someone would say no so I wouldn’t have to go, out they all agreed to going and looked towards me expectantly.

“Yeah, okay,” I said, forcing a smile back onto my face “It’ll be fun.”

Once we got to the restaurant, somehow a group of eight adults all fit around one tiny table. I was squeezed in one corner between someone who’s name I couldn’t remember, and of course Max.

“So,” Max turned to me “What are you up to since we - -”

“since we dated?” I interrupted.

“Yeah,” He chuckled a little. “That was how long ago?”

“Um, six months.”

I could tell him the date, down to the day, when Ella and April were taken. They weren’t the first people taken that I knew of, but they were our neighbors at the time. I exhaled sharply before responding. “I’ve been good. I moved in with Jules and we’ve been living together since.”

“You two seem close,” Max was digging now. This is what he did to April, how he found out about her and Ella.

“I mean, we aren’t that close. They were just a soft place to land after our break up.”

“They? Don’t you mean she?”

“Oh yeah,” My heart was racing. I might have just gotten Jules arrested. The police could come and take them and the last thing I would have said to them was, ‘I have to go.’ “When I moved in with Jules, April lived there too, but you know what happened to her.”

“Oh yeah, a real shame. She just couldn’t follow the rules,” Max said... I bit my cheek to stop myself from screaming at him. “I’m sure that *you* would never do that.”

I’ve never been more annoyed with someone. His arrogance overpowered any other voices sitting around the table. The woman sitting next to me leaned over.

"Nice boots."

"Thanks! Could you remind me of your name..." I said back to her.

"Lizzy." She smiled. "I like the purple laces."

"Oh, do you... know what they mean?"

"I mean me and my *roommate* are pretty close too." I giggled.

"They should meet sometime. Maybe you could stop by when we're done here," Lizzy said happily.

Max's head whipped around. "Oh my God, I'd love to meet Jules!" Max exclaimed.

"Would it be cool if I joined?"

My heart stopped. I couldn't say no, he'd report us. But if I said yes, he'd see me and Jules, and know.

"Um... yeah sure," I replied nervously.

"Awesome." Max nodded his head. He looked proud of himself, like he'd accomplished another arrest.

"Okay well, if we're going to go, we should leave now," I said, gathering my bag and coat. Lizzy nodded and Max stood up. We said our goodbyes and paid the bills. We got down to the subway platform and I pulled out my phone. I texted Jules being sure to cover my screen from Max.. I was so nervous he'd catch me and Jules. 'Hi love, I'm bringing home some people from work. It's Max (my ex) and someone new, Lizzy.' I didn't have any reception underground so the message wouldn't send.

Once we got off the train and headed towards my apartment, panic filled my lungs. As we approached the building's front door, I pulled out my keys and wiggled them into the keyhole. I opened it gently, staring up at the stairs ahead. I lead Max and Lizzy up the stairs, one at a time.

I opened our front door to see Jules sitting on the couch watching TV.

"Hey," they said, glancing at Max and Lizzy., "Oh, people?"

"Yeah from work. My text never sent?" I questioned. their phone chimed,

"I just got it." I smiled forcefully as they scanned the text. Their eyes said everything, we were both panicked. I reached again for my necklace.

"So this is Max, who you've met before, and this is Lizzy,"

Lizzy smiled wide, admiring the space. "Your apartment is gorgeous."

"Thanks!" said Jules. "It was mostly Meg. I just got the final say." Lizzy chuckled.

I glanced over at Max and noticed his gaze set on a picture frame. The photo was of me and Jules on a hike. They had their arms wrapped around my chest and were kissing my cheek. It was the picture we put away when people came over. I started trembling.

"It was a pleasure stopping by but I should head home.," said Max. He looked uncomfortable and awkward. I had never seen him like this before.

"Oh, alright then. It was nice seeing you again," Jules said, waving. He slipped out the door and I crumpled to the floor sobbing.

"What's wrong?" Jules came rushing over from the couch placing themselves just close enough to make out the words through my tears.

"He saw the picture," I sobbed. Jules' face dropped.

"What picture?" asked Lizzy, she moved towards me.

"You should probably go," Jules said looking up. "I don't want you to get caught in this too."

"It's okay, I'll stay," cried Lizzy, pushing back tears of her own.

"I think it's best if you don't." Jules said through tears of their own.

Lizzy nodded, she touched her hand to my shoulder before turning and running out the door.

All night we couldn't sleep. What do you do when you don't even know what's going to happen next? When you don't know where you'll be going or if you'll even be alive. In the morning, I called in sick to work, so did Jules. When they did come, I didn't want a big scene at the office. It was easier like this.

There was finally a heavy knock at the door. I took a deep breath.

"I love you Jules, so much more than you can ever imagine." I didn't want to but I had no choice. *Go down easy, don't make a scene* I thought. I turned and opened the door with tears pouring down my face to meet our final fate.