

“Come to the dance? Everyone’s going!” Amber asks as I pull up to her house. Jackson tenses, probably overthinking what would happen, and I know he would feel uncomfortable going.

“I’m not sure Amb, we were just going to stay at home.” I reply looking over my shoulder to look at her. I couldn’t go and leave Jackson alone. His brother, Henry, is abroad ‘clearing his head’ and their sister Ella is too upset to talk to anyone. Whereas Jackson will only talk to a few of us. I look at him and see he’s already looking at me.

“I’ll go if you want.” He said quietly. I do want to go but I’m not sure how well Jackson would handle it.

“Okay good! Guess I’ll see you later,” she hops out then pokes her head back in, “wait there a minute, I have the perfect dress for you.” She runs into her house and comes back holding said dress. She puts it in the back, waves and then leaves.

I drive towards Jackson’s house and he says, “I’ll pick you up at like 7 ok?”

“See you then.” I reply and begin driving home.

“Jackson’s here!” my mum calls from downstairs. Looking in the mirror, my jewellery stands out against the black dress. It has silver glitter all over and my hair is wavy.

I walk downstairs to see Jackson in a black fitted shirt and black jeans. His hair is messy, but he is wearing a few rings – all silver. He looks nervous but I want him to have a good time, so I don’t mention it.

“Ready to go?” he spoke lightly. We say goodbye to my parents, then walk together to his car. He holds the door open for me and whispers in my ear, “You look great Liv.” I blush a deep pink and get into the passenger seat.

It takes 15 minutes for us to get to the school hall and park. I get out of the car and go to Jackson’s side because he hasn’t got out yet. I open his door and ask, “Hey, are you okay?”

“Yeah. Just not fond of the crowds anymore.” He shrugs but gets out of the car, takes my hand, and walks towards the entrance. Ever since his mum contracted the virus and passed, he hasn’t been the same. He gets anxious and has panic attacks occasionally, but he assures us that he is alright.

Amber spots us and walks over. “You two look amazing! Want a drink?”

“No, I’m on driving duties.” He looks at me, but I decide against it too.

“No thanks, not looking to have a hangover tomorrow.” I giggle and pull both to the dance floor. Jackson dances hastily and Amber disappears with a friend.

20 minutes have passed and we’re still dancing. Jackson holds onto my hands and pulls me towards the door. His chest is heaving, and he looks flushed.

“Jackson? What’s going on?” he looks incredibly ill.

“It’s... I’m having a... a...”

“It’s okay, sit down. You’re alright” He slumps against the wall and looks at me helplessly. “Jack, listen to me. Jack follow my breathing, together. In. Out.”

His breathing slows and soon it’s back to normal. He is still shaken, his eyes watering slightly. I sit next to him and he leans his head on my shoulder.

“Let’s go back to my house, come on.” I lead him to the car and take his place as driver.

25 minutes later and we’re sitting on my lawn with a blanket over our shoulders. He looks upset, but slightly more comfortable.

“I’m sorry Liv, everything got too much, and everyone kept giving me the look. I’m sick of everyone’s pointless opinions, nothing can bring her back and that’s that.” He seems void, but I know he is hurting badly.

“Jackson it’s not your fault, you got overwhelmed and that’s okay. You’re not alone, we’re all here for you.” He squeezes my hand, holding on tightly.

“I know.” For a long time, we just sat there, holding hands. It was peaceful and we both savoured the moment for as long as it was there.

Charlotte Minett