

## VIII Julie

The first time I got drunk was at an Airbnb in Lake George. It was July 2017. My friends and I were celebrating our high school graduation. I was with Myles when I drunkenly Snapchatted his aunt, "I want you."

She sent back a nude picture.

Myles and I practically lived together. He got close to my family and I got close to his, though our family dynamics were drastically different.

His parents were divorced, and when we spent time with his family it was mainly his father's side. His aunt Julie felt more like a cousin figure to him because she was only eight years older than us.

A week after my drunken Snapchat, Julie and I started messaging again.

"I don't remember much of that night," I sent, "but I remember I Snapchatted you."

"Yes," she replied. "You Snapchatted me and I sent you a nice photo that you didn't even screenshot."

"I was too drunk. I also didn't know I was allowed to screenshot it."

She started typing, stopped, then sent another Snapchat. I opened it immediately.

Another nude. Captioned: "Well, here's your second chance."

I took the screenshot.

She made me change her contact name in my phone to "Main Hoe." I was single and flirting with a few girls at the time. Julie had a long-term boyfriend. I liked that she was taken because it meant I didn't have to commit to anything. We were just having fun.

Even before anything happened between us, we joked with Myles that we were fucking. We joked about it so often that the few times we actually tried telling him, he still thought it was a joke.

Julie and I cared deeply about each other as people, but we never fell in love. She fulfilled some kind of fantasy for me. One night she sent me a Snapchat of her legs beneath bathwater with the caption, "In between here can be your bed. Nighty night. Don't drown."

Around that time, Myles was going through his first heartbreak. He kept disappearing on everyone. That complicated things for me because I liked convincing him to go see Julie with me. It felt more serious once I started going to her house alone.

She lived a little less than an hour away. When I went over, her entire family was always there. They all lived together. Her mother, Myles' grandmother, sat in a recliner in the living room while her father stayed in his bedroom down the hall.

Her seven-year-old son refused to leave us alone. Julie liked joking with him that I was his stepmom.

I let him sit on my lap in my car while he played with the steering wheel and windshield wipers. I took a picture of him kissing my cheek, excited by the attention. I also had a picture of him running around their house with his boxers pulled up his butt crack, laughing that he was wearing them like his mom.

My favorite thing was watching Julie be a mother. I called it her “mom mode.” She softened into someone completely different. One night I slept over and her son complained he couldn’t fall asleep. I sat against the wall in Julie’s bed and watched her cuddle him, rub his back, and wait for him to drift off.

At the end of August 2017, Julie invited me over while her son was on a playdate. The second I walked inside, she grabbed my hand and pulled me upstairs to her bedroom.

I kissed her, pulled her against me, and started taking off her clothes.

She tried pulling me closer by my hair.

“No,” I laughed, moving her hands away before kissing her thigh again.

Then the bedroom door swung open.

“Jesus Christ. Put some fucking clothes on.”

Her father stood in the doorway.

My face burned. I jumped up and covered my chest while Julie screamed, “Jimmy, get the fuck out of here! Don’t you know how to knock?”

He muttered something under his breath as he walked away, leaving the door wide open behind him.

Julie slammed it shut, turned toward me, and started laughing.

“Well,” she said, “now Jimmy knows we’re fucking.”

We never got back to it that day. Before I left, she shoved her pineapple-print thong into my pocket and told me to keep it.

I got comfortable visiting Julie on my own. I’d spend time talking with Myles’ grandparents before disappearing upstairs with her. Afterwards, she’d do my hair. She complained she never got to play with her boyfriend’s hair the way she could with mine. Her favorite style was a messy bun.

She surprised me almost every day with a new nude sent to my snapchat. I knew she would be offended if I didn’t screenshot them. She was my first and only casual relationship. I think my favorite benefit was getting to say that I fucked my best friend’s aunt.

Then Myles completely cut me off.

He found out I told the boy who rejected him to block his number. I was friendly with the guy before and after the breakup, and honestly, Myles was spiraling. He wouldn’t stop messaging him. Sometimes he’d even drive past his house just to see if he was home. I got tired of watching him reopen the wound every day, so I intervened.

When he found out, I became the shitty friend he wanted nothing to do with.

Even after Myles and I stopped speaking, I kept seeing Julie.

As I adjusted to college life, balancing classes, softball, and being away from home, Julie became my stress relief. I'd convince her to drive to my school just to spend the night beside me.

I became dedicated to my routine. I woke up to go to the gym with my team, got to every class 10 minutes early, went to practice after classes, and then went to the gym on my own. Every minute of my day was occupied. It left little time to think about Julie or Myles.

I kept in touch as much as I could. Julie was adamant that I reach out to Myles to try to rekindle our friendship. I finally gave in and texted him to see if he was ready to talk about everything.

He responded, "I don't want to sound like a dick, but I don't think it's a good idea to keep in contact with my family."

"Are you talking about Julie??"

"Yeah. I just want our lives completely separated if we aren't going to remain friends."

"Well you can't tell me who I can and can't talk to? Julie and I are friends and she's helped me through a lot of shit. That isn't going to happen, you can't take a friend away from me," I was frustrated because he still didn't know that Julie and I had a deeper connection than just friends.

"I wouldn't go and talk to Claire because she's your support, your family," he said as if it was a good comparison.

I was on the phone with Julie and she told me to stop responding. She assured me that he has no control over her life. She said, "I'm an adult. I have the ability to be there for both of you and keep it separate. I'm sorry it didn't go well, but I know you two will be friends again eventually."

In November, she invited me to her house. Softball practices were paused for the holidays, so I had some extra time to spare. I showed up and she immediately jumped into my arms. I walked into her house. Sitting on the couch was her boyfriend, Caleb. "Hey Caleb," I said with a fake smile.

"Hey dude! What's up?" He greeted me.

I could tell he was coked up with a beer in his hand. I was never jealous of him.

Within minutes of being there, Caleb and Julie were already swearing at each other. "Can you move?" Julie said, annoyed.

"Where the fuck do you want me to go, Julie?" Caleb replied.

"Jesus fucking Christ, literally anywhere else."

Julie didn't let him touch her when I was around. He was oblivious to our entire situation. I honestly didn't feel bad for sleeping with his girlfriend.

As she was playing with my hair, she pushed me hard to talk to Myles again. "He told me how much he misses you. I think it's a good time to try again," she said.

“Fuck that, he made his choice,” I said.

“He doesn’t know what he needs. You know him, he can be dramatic. He loves you.”

“I don’t know. I’ll think about it.”

My brain decided to play a movie-style montage of Myles and I. *Fuck it, I’ll do it.*

“I miss you,” I texted Myles.

“Can I get you food?” He replied.

After exchanging a few simple words, we were back. That night he slept on the floor of my dorm room. Julie gave me that gift. I would have left him in the past without her pushing me. She knew we both were missing out on something great.

Julie and I slowly faded.

We never had a huge falling out. It was more of an understanding. As we spent less time talking, we finally got a chance to talk on the phone. “I think whatever we had has passed,” I said to her.

“I agree. We’re both busy. I still love you.”

“Oh, I for sure love you and we will still see each other. We’ve just reached our end for this fling.”

I sat at my desk in my dorm and wondered, *is this what a mature, adult relationship is like?* There was no drama. No tears. No big fight. We transitioned smoothly back to friends.

By the end of November, Myles, Julie, and I were hanging out again like nothing ever happened. We were all in Myles’ car when Julie turned down the music. She abruptly said, “We were actually having sex.”

“Yeah, yeah I know. You guys always fuck” Myles said jokingly.

I jumped in, “No, Myles, like we really had sex. We were fucking for the past few months. That’s why I got so defensive when you wanted me to cut her off.”

All the wires connected in his brain at once, “Wait really?”

None of us said anything else until we all burst out in a fit of laughter.