



Before Goodbye

An It Started with Goodbye Bonus Chapter

“There is a bit of insanity in dancing that does everybody a great deal of good.” —Edwin Denby

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On the outside, even I could admit they would make a nice-looking couple. Ashlyn's long blonde hair complimented his jet-black pompadour, always parted on the side. Her eyes were bright blue, like the dress that one actress wore to the Oscars last year, and his were dark, so deep brown they were almost black. But beyond that? I didn't get it.

"Don't you pay attention, Tate?" she'd said when I'd wrinkled my nose the first time Ashlyn had mentioned Robert Kang during our daily warm-up lap around the track in gym class. "Robert is perfection."

"That's a strong word there," I'd said, wishing she'd pump the breaks a little. In my world, no fifteen-year-old guy was anywhere close to perfection. Half of them hadn't discovered deodorant yet and the other half bathed in body spray. I was perfectly fine waiting to date one until they all got their hygiene routines in sync. Robert Kang, in my astute observation, was the king of the sophomore boys. Or, better yet, sophomoric. He and I had been in the same English class last year and he somehow managed to make an off-color joke about every book we read. Every poem too. He was also of the cologne-bathing variety. From what I'd seen, Robert wasn't without potential, but he definitely wasn't a knight in shining armor either.

"No, it's fact. He's captain of the JV football team, so clearly he has leadership skills. He's in several of my classes, so I see evidence of how brilliant he is on a daily basis. And I hear he has three little sisters, so it's obvious that he is patient and family-oriented."

Ash had not been in our English class last year. "Do you have a copy of his pedigree too?"

Ash scowled and then smiled. "I'm going to get him to ask me to homecoming. Just you wait."

"Why can't you ask him?" This wasn't the dark ages.

“Because I want him to want to ask me.”

“And manipulating him into that counts?” This time I was the one who scowled.

“I’m just going to make sure he notices what’s right in front of him, that’s all.”

Well, it worked. Which is how I found myself in a short, mint-green dress and gold heels, clutching my stepmother’s gold sparkly purse, reluctantly loaned to me, on the way to Ashlyn’s house so she could do my hair.

“You know, your mother wore a dress that color to a dance once. When we were in college. Of course it was a much different style, but....” My dad trailed off.

Despite the fact that my parents divorced when I was really little and my dad was remarried—to my robotic stepmother—I detected a wistful note in his voice. I got it. I knew exactly which dress he was talking about. Collecting dust on the very bottom of the bookshelf in our living room was an ancient photo album with a picture of my mom and dad at his college dance. I used to look at it a lot on the days when my stepmother was being particularly unreasonable. I don’t think choosing a dress of the same color for my first high school dance was an accident.

Even still, it was weird to hear my dad talking about Mom. He didn’t do it often, and I started to think this little trip down memory lane was going to do either of us any good. Least of all me, as my mood was already teetering between nervous, excited, and annoyed.

“Did you do the twist at that dance, Dad?” I teased, trying to make the air in the car lighter.

“No, it was more like the Charleston.” He waved one hand in the air, mimicking the dance from last century.

When we pulled up at the Zanotti house, we were both smiling.

“You look beautiful, Tatum.” Dad grabbed my hand and squeezed.

“Thanks, Dad.” I squeezed back, hopped out of the car and waved as I ran up the driveway.

A hand shot out of the cracked door and pulled me inside. “Come on, Tate. We have work to do.”

“Not if you dislocate my shoulder. Could you be a little more considerate of my joints, please?” I rubbed my arm. “Also, we have an hour before Mrs. Kang and her minivan of doom show up.” Ashlyn may have thought this was going to be the most magical night of her life, but I was mildly discontented to play wingman and be Robert’s best friend’s date.

Jackson Kennedy, the boy known for his presidential name, was quite possibly the least likely candidate for my choice of escort. Not that there was anything specifically wrong with him; the only thing I knew about him, other than the fact that his parents had ridiculous baby name opinions, was that he was the smallest guy on the football team. When the team lined up at pep rallies, poor Jackson looked sadly out of place. I suppose this tidbit of information made him brave, or reckless, but either way, it wasn’t enough to sell me on him. I didn’t have anything else to go on either—in the year and a half we’d both been at Henderson High School, I couldn’t remember actually hearing Jackson speak.

But, I’d said yes because I couldn’t break my best friend’s heart. I could take one for the team for a few hours and then figure out a way for Ash to make it up to me later.

“I think you underestimate how long it takes to turn an ugly duckling into a swan,” Ash said, hurrying me up the stairs and into her double-sinked, marble countertopped bathroom.

“Was that an insult?” I stuck my tongue out. I knew she was talking about herself. If anyone was underestimating, it was Ashlyn. She could put on a trash bag for her dress and still turn heads. Ash rolled her eyes at me and we both giggled.

With a pink towel draped over my neck and shoulders, Ashlyn painted my face with more concentration than Monet and his water lilies. Then she attacked me with a straightening iron,

which I will never understand how to use, and turned my stick-straight hair into a mass of waves our favorite magazine would call “beachy.” She finished by swiping my lips with a shade of red my stepmother would never approve of and told me to smoosh.

“There, you are gorgeous. Jackson will be eating out of your hand when he lays eyes on you.” Ash put her hands on her hips and nodded, approving her own work.

I checked myself out in the mirror and couldn’t deny that I looked nice. I would never have been able to do a smoky eye on my own. “Let’s make a few things clear. One, good job. You’re a miracle worker. Two, gross. I don’t want Jackson’s mouth anywhere near me. And three, also gross. Jackson Kennedy will be laying exactly nothing on me tonight. I am here because I love you, not because I have any interest in that boy.” I preferred to crush on boys with a sense of humor, interesting hobbies, and, you know, communication skills.

Ashlyn leaned over and pecked me on the cheek. “I love you too. So thank you.”

“You owe me.”

“Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe by the end of the night, you’ll owe me,” she countered with a wicked grin.

Ash finished her own hair and make-up, drew a bright pink smile on herself to match her pink shoes, and blew a kiss in the mirror. As if she’d also waved a magic wand, a horn sounded twice. I peeked out the window and spied a red minivan with the license plate GR8MMYK—*Great Mommy K*, really?—sitting in the driveway. Well. At least Mrs. Kang would be an excellent driver. That was one point in favor of this outing.

When Ashlyn and I got to the bottom of the stairs, her father was waiting, hands clasped behind his back. Mr. Zanotti was, even though it was Saturday night, wearing a crisp black suit that still bore the creases down his pants that the dry cleaners had left. I could count on one hand the

number of times I'd seen him wear something other than a suit in the four years Ash and I had been friends, and one of those occasions he had been wearing a tux. Mr. Zanotti didn't really do casual. It was one of the things he and my stepmother had in common.

"Girls. Your dates are here," he said, with undisguised resignation. Mr. Zanotti didn't seem like he'd joined the Robert Kang Fan Club yet either. Though it was probably more that he didn't want his precious daughter going on any kind of date at all.

I took half a second to verify that Jackson was not wearing a clown costume or pajamas, and then shifted my gaze to watch Robert's reaction to Ashlyn. Another point in favor of the dance—his eyes were so wide I worried they might fall out of his head and then where would we be. Good. Ash deserved that. Even if Robert turned out to be an unworthy date, at least he appreciated the effort she'd gone to for a few minutes.

"Wow, Ashlyn. Wow."

Ash smiled coyly at Robert and then morphed into dutiful daughter. "Daddy, please meet Robert Kang and Jackson Kennedy. They're both members of our football team. Robert is in several honors classes with me as well." She knew exactly which buttons to push to make her father lose the grimace.

"Hello, sir," Robert said, holding out his hand. A fancy-looking silver watch peeked out from his sleeve.

Mr. Zanotti shook it, firmly, and gave a slight nod in Jackson's direction. "Your mother is driving, Robert?"

"Yes, sir. I don't have my license yet. She's going to take us to dinner and then to school for the dance. She'll bring Ashlyn and Tatum back here right after. Sir."

"All right. Have a good time. But not too good."

Robert began to chuckle and then stopped abruptly when he realized Mr. Zanotti was not making a joke. Jackson just stood there, hands shoved in the pockets of his gray suit pants, staring at the wall.

“Well, let’s get going then. We don’t want to be late for dinner, right?” Ashlyn’s hands fluttered at her sides as she bolted out the door. The rest of us followed in a single file line, me bringing up the rear. Watching Jackson’s shiny black shoes plod down the front steps in front of me, I knew it was going to be a long night.

Mrs. Kang was a fantastic driver. Not only did she stop at every stop sign and red light, but also she put her turn signal on well in advance and she played her adult singer/songwriter music at a volume perfect for enjoyment while still holding a conversation. Not that there was any conversation happening. Jackson and I sat in the back row of the van, with at least four feet of space between us. I wondered if he was afraid of me, but decided to not question it. Ash and Robert took the two captains’ chairs in the middle; when Ash crossed her legs, I thought Robert might pass out. I watched him watch her for eleven minutes, until the car came to a stop. I sighed.

“We are here, kids. I’ll wait in the parking lot for you. What do you think? Thirty minutes to eat? Forty?”

I ducked down to see through the front windshield where we were. A strip mall. The one where my stepmother forced me to grocery shop with her when she was in the mood for organic. The only restaurant here was...

“Chipotle?” If Ash had been a full, bouncy helium balloon when we left, she was now stretched out, wrinkled and deflated. My heart squeezed for her. I knew she’d been dreaming about

somewhere with white tablecloths and two sizes of forks. Or, at least somewhere that required a reservation.

We got out of the car and Mrs. Kang waved cheerfully with one hand as she pulled an e-reader out of her purse with the other. Robert opened the door but instead of holding it open for the rest of us, like my dad insisted on doing, he slid in first, leaving Ashlyn to catch it before it shut on her. Things were going downhill fast. Jackson at least had the grace to blush at his friend's snafu. We got in line and I was grateful for the distraction of having the menu to consider.

"I wanted to pay for it myself, babe." I flinched, even though Robert wasn't referring to me. "Plus, who doesn't love burritos?" He laughed and fist-bumped Jackson, whose face cracked into a smirk for the first time since they picked us up. I mean, I love a good burrito too, but I wasn't trying to drip salsa on my dress or get lettuce in my teeth.

I leaned over to Ash. "Do you want to split a bowl?"

She nodded furiously. "Chicken?"

"And green salsa?"

Ash smiled weakly. This was our usual order, though typically we were in sweats and planning a movie marathon. Right before the Homecoming dance probably wasn't the time to try something new. Plus, it reminded me we were in this—for better or for worse—together.

Robert paid for all four of us—a nice but unnecessary gesture—and then two bites into his burrito, which was the size of his head, he belched so loud, people at other tables turned around. He erupted in a fit of boy-giggles, fist-bumped Jackson, and seemed put out when Ash and I didn't congratulate him on his seismic abilities. We sipped our root beers and side-eyed each other. Ashlyn's faith in her date was beginning to slip.

I decided to be the bigger woman and asked Robert and Jackson how the football season was going.

“We’re five and one, but we should’ve been six and oh,” Robert said, with a surprising amount of passion. Jackson nodded, brows furrowed in solidarity. “The ref in the Oak Springs game was completely biased. I think his step-nephew is on their team or something like that. He hit us with so many penalties. It was totally unfair.”

It was on the tip of my tongue to play devil’s advocate and ask if it was possible they’d just played poorly. But I bit it. Instead, I went with, “wow, that sucks.”

There was a lull before Robert launched into a ten-minute-long stream of consciousness review of the video game he bought last weekend. Jackson nodded about every thirty seconds or so. Then Robert stuffed the last third of his burrito in his mouth and, voice muffled by beans and rice, asked if we thought there would be a band or a DJ at the dance. “Because at least with a DJ, you can make requests.” Jackson nodded.

Ash pushed her half-eaten half of our chicken and rice away from her place and cleared her throat. “Tate and I need to go freshen up, if you’ll excuse us for a minute.” She smiled sweetly at Robert and Jackson, grasped my wrist in her hand, and we slid out of the booth.

I tucked the gold purse under my arm, teetering in my heels as Ash rushed me along. “How bad do you have to pee? My goodness!”

“I don’t have to actually use the restroom,” she hissed. She pushed through the swinging door, backed up against the nearest wall and slid to the floor. “I can’t take it anymore. If Robert says one more thing about video game controllers, I might scream.”

“Not so much the Prince Charming you were hoping for, huh?” I sat gingerly on the floor next to Ash, tucking my feet up behind me so I didn’t stab myself with the pointy heels. “I’m sorry.”

She sighed. “All I wanted was to go to a dance with a nice boy and my best friend.”

“Well, we can still do that....”

“Robert is nice, I guess, but he’s a lot of other things too. He’s not my nice guy.”

“No, I don’t think he is.” Sophomore boys were the worst.

I held my hand out to her and she took it. We sat there quietly, on the Chipotle bathroom, holding hands. Because that was what I could do for my best friend while she thought about how disappointed she was. Though this was exactly what I’d expected, I’d never say “I told you so.”

“Now what?”

I thought for a second and then pulled out my phone. I opened the map. “You know, we’re not too far from the mall. We could go walk around Mason’s. Buy some make-up. A pint of ice cream.” They were small things, Band-Aids for the open wound Ashlyn was sporting, but I could do them for her to try and make it better.

“How would we get home?” she whispered, tears sparkling in her eyes.

“Uber?”

She laughed. “Neither of us has a credit card. And I don’t think I can face my dad. Not tonight anyway.”

“So I’ll call my dad.” I squeezed her hand and Ash squeezed back. “Let’s get out of here.”

We stood up and dusted ourselves off. “How do we get out without them seeing us?” Ash wondered.

I poked my head out the door. Robert and Jackson were still in the booth. One of them had plugged ear buds into his phone and they were sharing them. Robert was drumming his hands on the table, which would have been fine except he had zero rhythm. Not a good indication of his dancing skills. Jackson just nodded along. I looked the other direction and saw the short hallway ended in a door that said “employees only.” Through the small square window at the top, cooks washing dishes were visible.

“Ever wanted a tour of the Chipotle kitchen?”

Our first stop at Mason’s department store was the first aid aisle for a jumbo-sized box of Band-Aids. Though it had only been a ten-minute walk, the blisters on my heels were the size of Alabama by the time we arrived. Once we were all patched up, Ash and I wandered aimlessly through the clothes and the make-up.

“You know, that color lipstick looked really good on you tonight, Tate,” she said, plucking an identical “Letters to Scarlet” tube off the shelf. “Let me buy it for you. A peace offering? I feel like the worst friend ever for dragging you out tonight.”

“You can. And you are.” I laughed and hip checked her. “But I still love you.”

Ash laughed too and for the first time since we left her bedroom, she looked truly happy.

We took another spin around the store, adding a bag of chocolate chip cookies and another of black licorice, Ash’s favorite, to the small basket she carried. As we were veering toward the register and I was bracing myself for the impending phone call home, Ash shrieked.

“What’s wrong?”

“Look!” Her pink-polished finger was pointing in the direction of the Mason’s Portrait Studio. “Let’s get pictures taken! My dad gave me some cash just in case my date didn’t pay.”

“Really? But those pictures are always super-cheesy. Plus, we’re not wearing matching polos, so they might not let us in.”

“Please?” Ashlyn pleaded. “We didn’t get to take photos at the dance. This is our chance to document this fabulous evening.”

I raised one eyebrow at her. “And why would we want to do that?”

“Because my best friend rescued me from disappointment, humiliation, and possible rage. I think that’s the kind of memory that deserves to be put in a frame, don’t you?”

“Okay, you have a point.” Ash threw her arms around my shoulders. “But we better hurry. They’re probably closing soon.”

Thirty minutes later, the tired photographer wished us a good night and turned off the light. She sent us home with the code to access our pictures online. The poses included me and Ashlyn with our tongues stuck out, Ash giving me bunny ears behind my head while I smiled with my eyes closed, and a more traditional “school dance” shot where Ash had her arm around my waist and I had placed my hand on her shoulder.

They were silly and cost more money than we should’ve spent when a selfie would’ve been just fine, but they were worth it. Ash was right. Despite the date being a complete and utter flop, we’d turned our lemons into lemonade. Though I shuddered to think what Robert was saying to our classmates at the dance—if he and Jackson actually decided to go—I was glad we’d escaped. I couldn’t think of a nicer way to salvage our night.

After we’d paid for two matching picture frames, plus the snacks and my new lipstick, I dialed my dad.

“Hi Dad. Do you think you could come pick me and Ash up?”

“Sure, honey. Tired of doing the hustle?”

“No. We didn’t make it to the dance actually...”

A pause. “Where are you?”

“Mason’s Department Store, at the mall.”

“And why are you there, instead of the school where you said you would be?” His voice had taken on a quiet, yet sharp, tone that I recognized as worry.

“Our dates were being rude and childish, so we left and walked over here.”

Another pause. “You walked?”

“Yes.”

A longer pause. “Wait for me outside the front door. I’ll be there shortly. I’m glad you girls stood up for yourselves, but I think we will discuss why the better choice would have been to call before you decided to walk somewhere alone in the dark at night.”

I wanted to point out that I hadn’t been alone, and that I’d had my phone, but I knew we’d be talking about it in the car regardless, so I didn’t. “Okay. And Dad? Could Ash spend the night?” I didn’t have to tell him why I was asking. He’d spent enough time with Mr. Zanotti at school events and the occasional holiday party to know what he was like. Let’s just say Ash escaped to our house. A lot.

“Sure. As long as Ashlyn calls her father and tells him where she is.”

“Deal.”

“I love you, Tatum.”

“I love you too, Dad. Thanks.”

“See you soon.”

Ashlyn and I made our way out front and sat down on a bench. We swung our feet, hers pink, mine gold, and watched two bats circling the tall, overhead light illuminating the parking lot.

“Dad wants you to call your dad.”

She sighed. “I figured. I’ll do it when we get to your house. He’s less likely to come get me then.”

“Who knows, he will probably be thrilled you didn’t end up dancing with Robert.”

Ash nodded. “That makes two of us.”

I was sad our little detour was over, but not as sad as I knew she’d be when she climbed her front steps tomorrow morning. Finding out your Prince Charming is a frog is a slap in the face that lingers for more than an hour or two. “Dance party when we get back?”

Ashlyn brightened and grinned at me. “Deal.”

She rested her head on my shoulder, until my dad pulled up and we went home to dance the night away.

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IT STARTED WITH GOODBYE
By Christina June
On-sale May 9, 2017
Available wherever books are sold

Sixteen-year-old Tatum Elsea is bracing for the worst summer of her life. After being falsely accused of a crime, she's stuck under stepmother-imposed house arrest and her BFF's gone ghost. Tatum fills her newfound free time with community service by day and working at her covert graphic design business at night (which includes trading emails with a cute cello-playing client).

When Tatum discovers she's not the only one in the house keeping secrets, she finds she has the chance to make amends with her family and friends. Equipped with a new perspective, and assisted by her feisty step-abuela/fairy-godmother, Tatum is ready to start fresh and maybe even get her happy ending along the way.

A modern play on the Cinderella story arc, *IT STARTED WITH GOODBYE* shows us that sometimes going after what you want means breaking the rules.

IT STARTED WITH GOODBYE will appeal to fans of Sarah Dessen, Stephanie Perkins, and Jennifer E. Smith.

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Praise for the book!

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"Tatum's complex and realistic relationships with her friends, family and the potential love interest will have you savoring every chapter while heavily anticipating the next. *It Started With Goodbye* is an adorable and clever contemporary that will enthrall you with its fairytale-esque charm." - Ami Allen-Vath, author of *Liars and Losers Like Us*

"I loved this fun, contemporary take on the Cinderella tale that explores what it takes to be yourself while finding your place in life, love, and your family. June's characters are vividly drawn, complex people that you'll want to root for, and Tatum's story will strike a chord for anyone who's felt like they were misunderstood." - Lisa Maxwell, author of *Unhooked, Sweet Unrest and Gathering Deep*

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