

The Things He Did

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I knew he looked familiar as soon as he walked into the store, but I still gave him my typical customer service greeting. He smiled at me before grabbing a bag of dog food and hauling it over to the counter.

“Hey, Summer. How have you been?”

How did he know my name? I scanned the food bag, not sure if I should ask him. “I’m good. Did you find everything okay?”

“Of course, this store is always so organized when I come in. Most people prefer to pick up their stuff at a big pet store, but I prefer cute little stores like this.”

“I completely agree. So, I assume you’re part of our loyalty program then?”

He chuckled. “Do you not know who I am?”

I looked back up at him and studied his face. “I’m sorry, I’m very forgetful.”

“Charlie O’Connor. My name is definitely in your system.”

“Alright,” I said as I typed in his name. “I haven’t been working here long, so I’m still trying to remember all the regular customers.”

“I wouldn’t say I come enough to be considered a regular, but Mia definitely recognizes me when... you know what? Never mind.”

Mia? I lifted my head at the sound of my best friend’s name. I suddenly realized why he looked so familiar.

“Oh, now I remember you. Sorry, Mia doesn’t like to talk about the guys she dates a lot and I think we only actually met once.” I looked at the computer. “Oh, and \$33.99 is your total, by the way.”

He handed me his card. “It’s okay, Mia and I didn’t even date for long, so it’s understandable. And trust me, it’s not like I come in because she works here, my dog just thinks this place has the best smells. He loves coming in here.”

I handed him his card back and glanced at the ground near his feet. I didn’t see a dog with him, so what was he talking about?

When he noticed me looking for this mysterious pet, he turned around to reveal a Chihuahua peeking out of his backpack. “This is Stuart. He’s extremely lazy. We walked for about ten minutes and then he was ready to be carried.”

Chloe, my own fur baby, was curled up on a bed behind the counter. “Tell me about it. Despite her size, Chloe over here only wants to nap and never feels like walking more than a few feet.”

He leaned over the counter to get a better look at my sleepy husky. “Wow, you can bring your dog to work? That’s awesome.”

“It really is, I feel like I lucked out for a first job,” I said. “Did you want your receipt today?”

“Yes, please,” he said, so I handed it over to him once it had finished printing. He reached for the bag of dog food, but then paused. “Hey, would you want to hang out at the dog park sometime? Both of our dogs can be lazy together.”

I couldn’t help myself, I had to at least give him a little giggle. “Oh, I probably shouldn’t.”

“Why not? I’m sure Chloe would enjoy it.”

I took a deep breath. “I just don’t think it’s appropriate, considering that Mia is my closest friend right now.”

“Relax, it’s not a date or anything. I just would like some more cool friends right now, you know?” He picked up a pen that was sitting on the counter and jotted something down on his receipt. He handed it to me with a dorky smile. “Well, here’s my number. If you change your mind, just text me. Sound good?”

I examined the numbers sketched on the receipt. “Yep, sounds good. See you around, I guess.”

Once he exited the store, I added his number to my contacts. It couldn’t hurt to have his it just in case.

The back door opened with a creak. I knew Mia was the second shift today, so I crumpled the receipt up and tossed it into the trash can.

“Summer! Hi!” Mia said as she rushed to give me a hug. “Has it been busy today?”

“Oh, you know, the usual.”

She nodded and crouched down to pet Chloe. “Hey, Chloe! You’re such a sweet girl!” She reached into her pocket and pulled out one Chloe’s favorite peanut butter bones and handed it to her. She gobbled the bone in seconds.

“Well, I better get going,” I said as I grabbed my purse and Chloe’s leash off the shelf.

Mia frowned. “Is something wrong? You’re usually really chatty when I come in. Like, did any crazy customers come in today?”

I really wanted to tell her about Charlie, but I figured it was something I should keep to myself for now. “No, not today. But everything is great. I’m just a little tired, that’s all.”

She set her purse down and clocked in on the computer. “Alright, go get some sleep then. If you need me to get you some food or anything after work, just let me know.”

“I will, thank you!” I hooked Chloe’s leash to her collar and headed to the door. She waved to me as I stepped outside.

Since I didn’t have anything else planned on a Saturday afternoon, I took Chloe to the dog park. It was a bit chilly outside, so the park seemed like a ghost town, but Chloe didn’t care. She just loved to trot around without her leash and dig holes. There didn’t need to be other dogs around for that.

However, I preferred to have some company. Sometime after arriving, I texted Charlie to see if he wanted to join me. After all, he was the one that initially offered.

“Wow, I’m surprised you’re actually here.” I heard his voice before noticing he was there. I’m not going to lie, I jumped a little.

“Don’t just sneak up on me like that, I get scared really easily,” I said with a laugh.

He sat down on the bench beside me and unhooked Stuart’s leash. “I’ll have to keep that in mind,” he said with a chuckle.

Stuart sniffed Chloe, who was laying beside me, and then took off, running in circles around the park. I laughed. “He doesn’t seem quite as lazy as you said.”

“Yeah, he’s a weirdo. Every once in a while, he explodes like this, but when I know he needs to go outside to pee, he refuses to get up.”

I glanced down at Chloe. “Come on, girl, go run around with Stuart.”

Chloe groaned and stood up slowly. She walked a few inches and then began digging another hole. Charlie tilted his head. “What is she digging for?”

“I honestly have no clue.” I laughed and got up to pet her. She stopped digging to soak up the attention and then immediately resumed when I took my hand away. “So, why are you surprised that I’m actually here? I texted you.”

“I’m not sure, you seemed a bit hesitant earlier.”

I sat back down beside him. “I know, but I’d like to get to know you better. You seem really nice.” I could tell he was just as awkward at starting conversations as I was, so I kept talking. “So, do you have a job?”

“Yeah, just at the gas station by school. I wish I could bring my dog to work like you though. That would make it so much more bearable.”

I laughed. “I actually forgot that you go to the same high school school as us. There’s just so many students and Mia’s one of the only seniors I know. All my other friends are juniors, like me.”

“Well, now you know two seniors. Don’t be scared to wave at me in the halls.”

“I won’t, it’s always nice to have more friendly faces.”

Stuart ran back over to us and jumped up into Charlie’s arms. He scratched the tiny dog behind the ear and then looked at me. “Are you hungry?”

“What?”

“Would you like to get ice cream or something after this? I know a great place that gives free vanilla cups to dogs.”

I glanced down at Chloe, who had now given up on her hole and was now sitting beside the bench, wagging her tail like crazy. “Well, how can I say no to Chloe’s adorable face?”

After that, things got even better. He was a sweet guy and while we hung out, I forgot that he had even dated Mia.

And after the hangout, I checked my phone. There was a text from Mia asking if I had a good rest. I couldn't help but wonder if she'd be mad if she found out about my new friend.

But surely, I could find a way for all of us to hang out like normal. Right?

I decided to try to keep it to myself just a little longer, but I ended up having a shift that overlapped with Mia's a few days later. It was so hard not to tell her everything.

"You know, Summer, we haven't really hung out in a while. I've missed you," she said as I helped her reorganize the store.

"Yeah, I'm really sorry about that. I've been kind of busy."

I felt my phone vibrate in my pocket and I briefly peaked at it. It was a text from Charlie. I quickly shoved my phone back in my pocket and got back to work.

"Oh, who was that?"

"It was no one."

"Oh my god. Was it a boy?"

"Mia, you know I'd tell you if I was seeing someone. One of my friends just texted me, that's it."

"Okay, if you say so."

I hesitated for a moment. "But you know what? You never talk about your boyfriends. Why's that?"

Her smile falters. "Because there's nothing to say."

"You may think that, but I'm not very experienced. I could learn a lot from you."

"You mean you can learn from my dumb mistakes?"

I shrugged. "I mean, yeah. But, um, which relationships were mistakes exactly?" I couldn't help it. I just really wanted to get to the bottom of this.

“All of them, of course.”

“What about Charlie?”

“Why?”

“You know, he’s your most recent ex. I just want to make sure you’re okay. And if you ever want to talk about it, just let me know.”

“Thanks, Summer. I really appreciate it. But there won’t be anything to talk about. He’s a jerk, end of story.”

And that was my cue to stop talking. I knew it was hard for her to talk about personal things sometimes, but as her best friend, not knowing these things was torture.

I glanced at the empty spots on the shelves in front of me. “I just need to go grab some more treats from the back room, I’ll be right back.”

I walked away to the supply room and grabbed a step ladder, so I could reach the treats on the top shelf. I was about to step onto the ladder when I heard a familiar voice.

“Is Summer here?”

Oh no. It had to be Charlie. And the only one up there was Mia. My heart pounded out of my chest.

Without thinking, I rushed out to them. Maybe, just maybe, I could get them to be friends.

She turned to me the second she heard my footsteps. “Summer? Why is *he* here?” I had never heard Mia talk with such hatred before.

“Mia, let me explain. He’s actually a nice guy!”

“And how do you know that? Have you been hanging out with him?”

I looked at him for help, but he just shrugged and took a step back.

“Summer, can I have a word with you in the back, please?” Mia said, but I didn’t really have a choice. She grabbed my arm and dragged me into the supply room. Charlie couldn’t seem to make eye contact with me as I was pulled away.

“Mia, I’m really sorry. I was going to tell you.”

“Is that why you brought him up before? I said he’s a jerk and I still stand by that. Plus, you know he dumped me.” She couldn’t bring herself to look at me. The way she spoke was so unlike her that I wasn’t sure how to handle it.

“Mia, how would I even know who dumped who if you won’t talk to me about it?” I asked. “Besides, he’s been really nice to me and I’ve never been given a reason to think otherwise. How am I supposed to stop being friends with him if I don’t have a good reason to?”

She looked at the ground and opened her mouth as if she had something to say, but no words came out.

“Look, if you give me a good reason not to hang out with him, I won’t. But I just need you to talk to me, okay?” I said.

She struggled to speak again. She was shaking ever so slightly.

“Mia?”

“Do you like him?”

“What? No, we’re just friends.”

“Does he know that?”

“Of course.”

She nodded, but couldn’t seem to look me in the eye. “Just wait. He’ll try to hook up with you. I guarantee it. Just leave me out of it.” She walked away but I grabbed her arm.

“Please just tell me what he did to you.”

“God, Summer, I don’t want to talk about it. If you really want to hang out with him, then go ahead, but please leave me alone. As long as you’re still friends with him, I don’t want to hang out with you. I’m sorry.”

She yanked her arm out of my grasp and stormed back up to the front of the store. I peeked out of the supply room to see that Charlie had already left. I wondered how much of that conversation he had overheard.

I finished up the rest of my shift in silence. Even as I handed items to Mia, she refused to meet my gaze. It was the longest shift of my life. As I was about to leave, I said, “Bye, Mia! See you tomorrow?”, but her only response was a weak wave.

I drove home and thought about what had happened that day. Of course, I wanted to believe Mia. I just didn’t understand why she wouldn’t explain herself if she really cared so much.

My phone buzzed about an hour or two later while I was sitting in my room. When I saw Charlie’s name light up the screen, my heart pounded, but I still answered it. “Um, hello?”

“Hey, Summer! I was just wondering if you wanted to go bowling with me tonight? I have a coupon for buy one, get one free, so you won’t need to pay at all!”

“Well, I do love bowling,” I said. “But did you forget what just went down at the pet store? I don’t know if it’s a good idea for me to go.”

He paused for a moment. “I didn’t stay to listen to you two argue. It really wouldn’t be my place to interfere. I’m really sorry I got in the way of your friendship, though.”

“Thanks. I’m sure it will smooth over soon enough.” Even as I said it, I wasn’t quite sure if I even believed it.

“So, bowling?”

I supposed it couldn't hurt to hang out with him again. "Sure, I will meet you there!"

When I arrived at the bowling alley, he was already standing outside his car, waiting for me. I pulled up beside him and climbed out of the car. "Hi!"

He turned to face me. "Hi, Summer. It's great to see you again!" He stepped forward and hugged me, which felt a bit odd since we weren't that close, but I hugged him back anyway.

"Yeah, I'm excited, although I'm not too great at bowling." I laughed just thinking about my pathetic score last time I played. "I also wish Mia would be willing to hang with us."

He narrowed his eyes. "Wait, why would you want Mia to hang out with us?"

"Um, because she's my best friend and I want all my friends to get along."

He leaned closer to me. "But what if I don't want to be your friend?"

"Huh?"

He shoved my body against the car and kissed me. I struggled to pull away, but he was too strong. I kicked him with all my might, but it only caused him to back away and chuckle.

"What the hell was that for?" I said as I stepped away from him.

"I told you. I don't want to be just friends with you, Summer. You're too hot." He leaned in for another kiss, but I quickly dodged it.

"I can't date you and you know it."

"Why? Because of Mia? Is she really your friend if she makes you choose between me or her? Besides, we don't have to officially date or anything." He stepped closer, reaching toward me, but I ducked before I could see exactly where he was reaching for.

"Maybe she had a really good reason for the decision."

I quickly jumped back into my car, slamming the door and locking it as fast as I could. He banged on the window and screamed at me, but I pulled away before I could hear what he was saying.

I drove straight to Mia's house and pounded my fists against the door. Her mom answered and looked at me with a frown. "Summer, is everything alright?"

"Yes, but I just really need to talk to Mia. Is she home?"

"I think she just went to bed." Her mom glanced back into the house, toward Mia's bedroom. "I can go get her for you, though. Would you like to come inside? It's a bit chilly out here."

I shook my head. "No, thank you. She can just meet me out here."

Her mom looked hesitant as she closed the door, but I did not want to be an inconvenience to the family. I sat on the bench outside the front door.

It only took a few minutes for Mia to come outside. She rubbed her eyes and let out a yawn. "Summer, what's going on?"

"You were right. You know, about Charlie."

Suddenly she sprung back to life and sat down beside me. "Wait, did he try to force himself on you?"

I was about to nod, but then I froze. "Wait, is that what happened to you?" She looked at the ground and bit her lip, so I gently put my hand on her shoulder. "Mia, I'm here if you want to talk about it."

"Thank you, Summer. I'm sorry that I've been avoiding it. I should have just told you the truth." Tears fell from her eyes. "He did more than just try to take advantage of me, he actually succeeded. He did it all the time. And he was my boyfriend, so I thought it was okay."

I leaned over and hugged her. “It’s okay, you don’t have to go into details if you don’t want.” She took a deep breath and wiped her nose on her sleeve. It was one thing for him to mess with me, but to put my friend through all of that. “Maybe we should do something about this.”

She wiped her eyes and then stared at me. “What do you mean?”

I took a deep breath. “I think we need to get revenge somehow. You know, stand up to him to show him that he can’t mess with any other girls like this.”

“I don’t know, Summer. I don’t think I’ll be able to do that.”

I took her hand and squeezed it tightly. “Trust me, I’m scared too, but I’ll be there with you, so we can support each other. I don’t think we should just ignore what happened.”

She slowly stood up, her body shaking, but I was certain it was not because of the weather. “Alright, let’s do it.”

I led her to my car and we hopped in, driving straight to Charlie’s house. Once we entered his neighborhood, Mia’s eyes widened as she clutched her seat. “I haven’t been here since we broke up,” she said under her breath.

I slowed the car down and parked just before the house. There he was, walking up to his front door with someone else beside him. All the lights in his house were out.

Mia leaned closer to the window. “Who is he with? His parents both usually work late.”

I squinted, trying to get a better look at the second figure. “It looks like another girl our age. I think she might be a freshman at our school.”

Neither of us made a move, until the they both stopped just in front of the house.

Charlie’s hand was on the doorknob and the girl appeared to be talking to him. Once she stopped talking, he opened the door and put his hand on her back to lead her inside.

Without hesitation, Mia and I burst out of the car at the same time, rushing over to them. “Charlie, get the hell away from her!” Mia shouted, but the second he turned to look at her, she stopped dead in her tracks.

“Um, what do you think you’re doing? Get away from my house.” he said to Mia, but I continued to walk toward him.

“No, Charlie, we won’t,” I said. “The way you treated us is not okay and we won’t let you keep trying to get with other girls too.” I motioned toward the freshman standing beside him, who looked extremely puzzled.

He shook his head. “You’re crazy. I treated both of you with respect. Mia is just salty that I dumped her and Summer, you’re just mad that you didn’t get with me when you had the chance.”

“Excuse me? All I wanted was to be friends with you and you see how well that turned out!”

The girl turned to Charlie. “Um, what is she talking about? I mean, we’re just friends, right?”

Charlie ignored her and stepped toward me. “You have some nerve showing up at my house after all I did was kiss you.”

“Well I never wanted you to kiss me!” I blurted out.

Mia stepped up beside me and held my hand. “It’s not just her, Charlie, it’s me too. You hurt both of us and we’re not just going to let you keep hurting other girls.”

The other girl took a step back. “I think I should get going,” she said as she raced off to her car across the street.

“Now look what you did!” Charlie said. “That girl was so dumb and probably would’ve done whatever I said. You guys are going to pay for this.”

He clenched his fists as he looked each of us up and down.

“Actually,” I said, “no girl is ever going to do whatever you say ever again.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

I held up my phone. “I just recorded this entire conversation. If we ever catch you trying to mess with another girl, we’ll post this for everyone to see.”

His eyes widened and he looked at Mia for confirmation, but she only smirked.

He rolled his eyes and stepped away. “Fine. You guys don’t scare me, but you’re not worth the trouble. Just please get away from me.” He turned around and went inside the front door. The second he was out of sight, I gave Mia a high five.

“I can’t believe we actually did that,” I said.

She smiled and gave me a hug. “Summer, I couldn’t have even considered doing it without your help. Thank you so much.”

I would never let anyone come between me and my best friend again.