



You Send Me Preview

Millie strode around the lake's edge toward the boathouse, Betsy trudging behind. "Why do we have to go canoeing anyway? We don't even know *how* to canoe. What if we fall in and drown?"

Determined and resolute, Millie kept her answer simple. "Life isn't worth living if you don't occasionally experience something new." Like coming face to face with a guy who makes your body race with excitement. She was afraid, of course – since there was a *reason* she was supposed to stay away from boys like this one – but she had to do it. She simply *had* to. So she kept walking, not letting herself slow down even as she drew nearer and he came more clearly into view – because if she slowed down, she might stop. And for once in her life, she had to go barreling full steam ahead, come what may.

As they neared the boathouse, she could hear Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers singing "Why Do Fools Fall in Love?" on a transistor radio propped against the building. The sun beat down, almost hot now, and she began to sweat. She was hardly in love, but she was definitely in ... something.

She and Betsy ventured out onto the dock, but her dangerous boy was nowhere to be seen. For some reason, that made her heart beat even harder.

That's when she felt someone's eyes on her – definitely not Betsy's – and turned to find *him*. He leaned comfortably against the doorway of the boathouse, his muscular arms crossed. His hair was combed back into a ducktail, with one wayward lock dipping across his forehead, somehow making him look even *more* devil-may-care. And his warm green eyes ... swallowed her. "What can I do for you?" he asked, smooth and deep.

Her heart pounded and she feared her nipples might show through her bra and blouse. "I ... *we* – want to go canoeing," she managed. Then held out the money her father had given her for the excursion.

His gaze flicked to Betsy and she almost got the impression it was the first time he'd noticed Millie wasn't alone.

His eyes returned to her just as quickly though – even if they drifted down a bit, seeming to peruse her body. It should have horrified her, but it didn't. Instead, it only increased the tingling sensation skittering through her underwear. He raised his gaze back up to say, "You ever done this before?"

She swallowed, hard. Get hot and bothered? Or get in a canoe? The answer to both was the same. "No," she managed.

When their eyes met once more, his look almost made her think he could read her thoughts. Then he motioned to a bin filled with orange lifejackets. "Well, you'll need those. And a few instructions."

Millie tore her gaze away and padded uneasily past him to select a life vest, Betsy following. As she tried to concentrate on getting the belts fastened, then tightened – challenging since she was suddenly so nervous – he explained how to guide the canoe.

And then he was passing an oar into her hand and – oh my, moving behind her, reaching around her from either side to show her how to hold it. She could barely breathe he was so close, his arms touching hers, and chills of pleasure raced down her spine. She glanced up to see Betsy staring, mouth open, eyes wide.

"You want the blade to slice into the water like this," he said, showing her the correct motion. And she tried to pay attention, but mostly all she could focus on was how good he smelled: musky, masculine ... hot.

When finally he released her, she turned toward him – but she'd forgotten how close the move would bring their faces. Despite how unattractive she would normally feel in a big orange lifejacket, she once again felt frozen in place by his eyes.

“I’m Johnny, by the way,” he told her, voice low. “Johnny Pickett.”

“M-Millicent Anderson,” she returned. “But people call me Millie.”

“Millie. That’s cute.” His mouth quirked into a slight grin. “You be careful out on the water now, Millie. And I’ll be here waiting when you get back.”

He *would* be? What did *that* mean?

Then it hit her. Flirting. He was flirting with her. She just wasn’t used to it.

But she liked it. So she let herself smile at him. And felt the sensation trickle down through her like a cool drink of water on a blistering hot summer day.

Once she and Betsy were out on the lake, away from the boathouse, Bet craned her neck around to flash a disapproving look. “What were you doing flirting with that man? Are you out of your gourd?” Apparently her little sister was quicker to recognize flirting than she was.

But it hardly mattered – Millie remained lost in remembering his eyes, and his slight touch. Her whole body practically sizzled with a giddiness she’d never felt before. “You don’t think he’s dreamy?” she asked her little sister. They both liked Elvis, after all – so didn’t Bet see the dark appeal Johnny Pickett held, as well?

Betsy blinked, clearly taken aback by the very suggestion. Yet then her lips pursed slightly. “Well, he has a handsome enough face, I suppose, but ... did you see his arm? He has a tattoo! And he smokes cigarettes!”

The tattoo, Millie had noticed, was of an eagle. “That doesn’t make him a horrible person.”

“Well, it makes him a *scary* one.”

Millie couldn’t help but laugh. Any other day of her life, she’d have agreed. She’d applied the same word to him in her mind, after all. But now something about Johnny Pickett thrilled her much more than frightened her.

Of course, it had only been a little flirtation. And she hadn’t even done very well at it. So it was probably over – a thought which made her shoulders slump heavily.

But it still felt amazing just to know he thought she was attractive, worth flirting *with*. And to have walked over here with the secret and sole intent of meeting him had left her feeling a strange

sort of accomplishment. Maybe for other girls, this sort of thing came easy, but for her – despite being a grown woman – it was brand new.

Then a fresh thought hit her. “You can’t tell Mother and Father,” she warned.

Her sister let out a put-upon sigh, but said, “You know I won’t.”

“Thanks, Bet,” she replied, giving her little sis a smile. “Besides, it was nothing, over as soon as it began, so no harm done.”

“I guess. But we’ll be here a week. You’d better be careful around him.”

Millie bit her lip at the reminder. Yes, she’d just decided it was probably over already, but they *would* be here for a whole week, and who knew what that week could hold? More excitement? More of those hot, tender aches that were starting to feel too delicious?

When the two girls brought the canoe gliding back up alongside the dock an hour later, true to his word, Johnny was there to greet them, grabbing hold of the boat, then anchoring his boot inside to steady it as they climbed out. He offered Millie a hand and she didn’t hesitate to take it, the small touch again sending ripples of desire coursing through her.

“How’d you do?” he asked after hefting the canoe to the dock.

She was struggling to get her lifejacket undone, but lifted her gaze to his. “Um, I think I got the hang of it.”

“Good,” he said warmly, the one simple word seeming to hold a secret. Then he glanced over at Betsy, who was out of her life vest and dropping it back in the bin across the dock. “How about you? Have fun?”

Appearing afraid to even speak to him, Betsy only nodded.

He laughed slightly in response. Then noticed Millie still fighting to get out of her lifejacket – there was a knot in one of the white belts. His voice came low. “Let me.”

She sucked in her breath as his hands came up near her chest to calmly, surely work at the knot. But it took a while, during which Millie could barely breathe as she studied him, first his hands, so close to her breasts, then the stubble on his chin, a small scar near his right eye. Her stomach swam with ... pure want. Perhaps it was shameful, but she couldn’t deny it.

When finally the knot came undone, she waited for him to release the lifejacket from his grip – but he didn't. Instead he only leaned even closer and whispered. "Come back tonight, after dark."

What? "W-why? What happens after dark?"

"Come find out," he rasped near her ear.

Then let her go.

She could barely feel the dock beneath her shoes as she walked away.

Of course, she *couldn't* come back. Even if she was brave enough, she'd never be able to get away from her parents alone.

But then she remembered her own thoughts from a little while ago, about what the week could hold. Now it was suddenly about what the *night* could hold. More excitement? More of those delicious, tender aches?

If only ...

If only she could get back here somehow.

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