

# Miles

Miles finds himself standing at a crossroads, overwhelmed by emotions as he grapples with the weight of his brother Wynton's coma. The guilt and sorrow that have taken hold of him feel suffocating, pushing him into a state of detachment from those around him. Sitting under the shade of a sprawling willow tree, he finds temporary solace in the silent companionship of his dog, Sandro, the only presence that seems to truly understand him. The weight of Wynton's absence is heavy, and Miles is haunted by the thought that he might never have the chance to make amends. His mind drifts to Cassidy, a girl he believes could offer some form of salvation, though he isn't sure whether it is for himself or his brother. The uncertainty of the future presses in, making every passing second feel unbearably long.

Sandro, with his unwavering loyalty, picks up on Miles's distress and nudges him with quiet encouragement, as if to suggest that seeking help isn't a sign of weakness. The thought of therapy or medication lingers in his mind, but the stigma and his own stubbornness keep him from acknowledging that he might need it. He is reminded of his conversation with Dean Richards, who had confronted him about his slipping academic performance and lack of social engagement. The words had stung, but the truth was undeniable—Miles had lost himself in his grief, allowing it to consume every part of his existence. The heaviness of his family's sorrow only adds to his feelings of alienation, making it difficult to see a path forward. He wonders how things might have been different if he had made better choices, if he had paid closer attention to the signs before Wynton's accident.

As he sifts through his fragmented thoughts, memories of the past resurface, particularly the reckless night that led to his brother's downfall. He remembers the party, the poor decisions, the reckless fun that quickly spiraled into chaos. Wynton had stepped in for him, taking responsibility when things got out of control, ultimately

sacrificing his own future in the process. Learning that his brother had spent a night in jail for his mistakes makes Miles's stomach churn with guilt, further deepening his self-hatred. The knowledge that Wynton had always been there for him, even at his own expense, is almost too much to bear. The thought of facing his comatose brother now feels impossible, like a confrontation he is too much of a coward to endure.

Desperate for an escape, Miles turns to Lookn, a dating app, hoping that a fleeting connection might provide some relief from the storm in his mind. He matches with a guy named Rod, who offers the promise of distraction, if nothing else. However, before he can fully process the situation, his plans take an unexpected turn when Felix, an eccentric and energetic stranger, bursts onto the scene. Felix intervenes in a way that is both chaotic and oddly reassuring, disrupting Miles's carefully constructed walls of solitude. There is something about Felix that immediately draws Miles in, an effortless confidence that feels magnetic in contrast to his own spiraling thoughts. Despite his initial hesitation, Miles finds himself caught in Felix's orbit, unable to resist the allure of this unpredictable force.

Felix's lighthearted nature clashes against the weight of Miles's inner turmoil, yet somehow, it offers him a brief reprieve. Their banter is effortless, a rhythm that feels natural in a way Miles hasn't experienced in a long time. Felix's stories of travel and adventure intrigue him, stirring a longing for something beyond the pain that has anchored him in place. As they walk deeper into the woods, the boundaries between past regrets and future possibilities begin to blur. For the first time in what feels like forever, Miles allows himself to entertain the thought that perhaps he isn't entirely alone in this world. Felix's presence, however unexpected, plants the smallest seed of hope within him—a glimmer of something he isn't ready to name just yet.