

Bowled Over

by

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Hindsight is that wonderful voice in your head that says, *now you can see you weren't ready*. Thanks a lot! Fat lot of good that piece of information is doing me now! Hindsight, you are such a smart ass, and nobody likes a smart ass.

I felt ready to bowl in the fundraiser competition, at the time. I'd practiced over and over, well, one game anyway. Perfect, every time, except this time. The one time my performance counted, when everybody happened to be watching and wondering if the brutha could perform the simple act of ten pin bowling. With no doubt, at all, that they doubted my prowess at bowling.

The many sets of eyes upon me at the time, all held the same gleam. The one people get when someone professes competence, and then fails. Mouthing off about how easy it would be proved to be my greatest downfall, so to speak. I just should have kept my mouth shut. *Nobody likes a smart ass*. Shut up, Hindsight, you are beginning to get on my nerves!

They all wanted to see the supreme confidence of Jared Brown brought down a peg or two, all in good fun of course. June went around everyone and roused them into a frenzy. She had a way with people. Everyone loved her. I loved her more.

June Baden, all, willowy and white. Her platinum blonde hair hung straight, her clear blue eyes almost transparent. Her skin as pale as mine is dark. She'd been my girl, people had stared at our contrast, but I never cared, I was proud. She was my woman. The woman I wanted back in my life more than anything in the world. The one who still made my heart skip a beat and gave me sweaty palms.

June Baden, the one I hurt, left me. Cruel, really, that we remained friends, although it did seem a

fitting punishment for me, to have to see her everyday but never get close.

Looking down at my aching leg and bandaged, plastered forearm, the stupidity of the whole situation hit me. What on earth did I want to prove I could bowl for anyway? I mean, you aimed it for the pins. You worked up a bit of slide for showmanship and belted it down there for a strike. Men did it, children did it, and heck, I'd even seen a little old granny do it.

The Bowl always boasted a plethora of fun-loving women but my eyes looked at only one. It seemed my six foot, six inch frame of male competency could not perform a simple bowl. I wouldn't have showed off so much if she hadn't slapped my backside, saying, "let's go big boy! Let's see what you can do?"

She used to love you, Jared Brown. Back off, Hindsight

June Baden, the loud, crass, capable and feisty woman I am hopelessly in love with. She goaded me until I needed to prove I could do it. One of these days I'll...*Apparently you weren't ready.* Shut it! Hindsight, or so help me...yeah sure, what can I do, kick my own butt?

You should have practiced more.

Damn straight, I should have practiced more. The next time I hear myself utter the words, how hard can it be? I will use my foresight. *Foresight only comes from hindsight,* Okay, okay Hindsight, point taken. You are the important one here.

If I never let that woman get under my skin so much, I wouldn't get around making a fool of myself. *You should have been faithful to her when she loved you.* Just a kiss, just one lousy kiss with someone else, and I'd been drunk. She kissed *me*, that other girl, really. *You should have been home with June. She'd cooked your dinner.*

What have you turned into Hindsight, the Dr Phil of my higher self or something? Is there anything you *don't* know Hindsight?

My heart ached every time I remembered the look on June's face when my best mate blurted out about the kiss. He never knew she stood behind him as he stirred me up about trying to climb the corporate ladder by pashing the daughter of our boss. The look of utter betrayal showed immediately on June's face.

That night she moved back to her parents place, they could be her hindsight, especially her Father, "I told you he was no good, amount to nuthin." That is the kind of thing he would say. He's right too. The best

thing to ever happened to me, and look what I did, why?

You wasn't ready, you said. I let big gust of breath whoosh out of my lungs and my shoulders slumped...No, apparently, I wasn't ready.

Two years flew past. At least June stayed friends with me. Sometimes the urge to hold her tightly, tell her how sorry I feel and that maybe, I am ready, threatened to consume me. But men didn't do that. My father told me not to be a cry-baby, but I'll be damned if I ever treat a woman the way he treated Mama. They might have named me Jared, after him, but I will never *be* like him.

June would probably all off and thump me if I tried to disrespect her in any way. She is strong, of willpower, I mean. I thought she was strong emotionally too, but she definitely is not. For all her toughness, and wilfulness, underneath hid a vulnerable human being. Wish I didn't have to hurt her to find out. She is just like me inside. Neither of us can admit our vulnerability easily.

My front door rattled and I heard the sound of a key in the lock. Only one other person had a key, June, but she normally knocked nowadays.

"Sorry, I let myself in. Thought you may be sleeping, or something," she said as her she peered around the doorway. Her porcelain complexion shone with a little ruddiness.

Her shining, white hair fell over the side of her face as she peeked at me through the half open door. If I'm not mistaken, a look of concern lingered on her pretty face. It disappeared before I had the chance to make up my mind.

"Come to gloat, have you?" I asked. Sounding as much like an injured child as I could. Going for the sympathy vote.

"No, not at all, I mean, what would be the point! You should already know what a donkey you made of yourself," her eyes twinkled back at me.

The distinct feeling she forced herself to keep a straight face hung in the air. I grunted and turned my head away, sulking, hoping for some sort attention. I heard the door shut and her footsteps as she neared the sofa. "There, there. I mean, just because you were the first person to, ever, take a slide down the lane, doesn't mean *everyone* is laughing at you!" her melodic voice now dripped with sarcasm.

"Oh, shut it," I stated, still refusing to look at her.

"It is obvious you just aren't ready for the highly-skilled game of bowling!" June added.

"Be...*quiet*," I said again, using more emphasis this time.

"I have a phone number here, Granny Jones, she's eighty-two, said give her a call and she will spot you a lesson or two!"

June broke out into the loud laughter I'd always found so attractive. Her raucous laugh proved infectious and I began to feel the mirth build inside, but struggled to maintain my sombre look. Doubled up now, her words came in gasps.

"How hard can...it be? you said. I tried to tell you to practice..." she giggled on, apparently, oblivious to the frown on my face. In fact, I think it may have made her laugh harder, "you aren't supposed to get a run up, you nutter!"

I felt the tickle in my stomach and then the humor of the situation erupted into a belly buster. Tears coursed down my face and I struggled to compose myself as I spoke. "Well, how was I to know?" pausing for laughter and trying to catch my breath, "I thought the holes had to be tight around my fingers and the heaviest ball should hit harder...right?"

June hooted, "and...they just polished the lanes. You just had to wear those stupid boots. Did you mug a cowboy on the way over or something?"

"I didn't want to look like an idiot in those bowling shoes!" with that we broke down completely.

I just laughed until I no more would come and my sides now ached along with my arm and leg. June flopped beside me on the sofa. Her hand momentarily, touched my leg.

My whole body remembered her touch and craved it again. As I looked at her in that moment, I knew June would be the only girl for me. I *was* ready now, but I doubt she'd ever trust me again, couldn't blame her really.

The movement required me to turn toward her a little more, proved painful. My broken wrist and badly bruised leg would heal.

My heart wouldn't, not unless she loved me again.

"June, I don't think I ever *really* apologized to you for that night. I made up excuses about why it wasn't my fault but I never apologized. I really regret, everyday, what I did to you. I am sorry, I just wish you could

love me again.” I said, humbly.

I could hear my father saying, “don't be too soft on 'em boy. They'll only wanna own ya”. Maybe I want to be owned. I noticed June's expression soften a little.

“Who said I ever stopped?” she said, coyly. Hope filled my heart and mind, just maybe.

“You mean, you still love me?”

“Maybe I do, maybe I don't.” It had always been hard for me to know when she was joking. I prayed she joked this time.

“Have you forgiven me?”

“I think so.” Her stare bore back at me.

“Why didn't you say so?” My heart pounded against my ribs in hopeful anticipation.

“I wasn't ready,” her gaze fell. Maybe she still isn't ready to be with me, but asked because I had enough regrets now and I didn't want to give Hindsight anymore ammunition. *You've got enough stored up for a lifetime now.* I ignored that thought from Hindsight.

“And are you ready now?” I questioned, hopefully.

She kept her eyes averted and the knowledge of loss resounded deep within me. I already knew her answer.

“No, I think I need a bit more time!” Her long, lithe body rose from the sofa and moved towards the door fluidly.

“Ok, I deserve that. I don't deserve you at all. You are way too special a woman for the likes of me...June?” She turned back to me and I continued, “whatever happens, be happy. I just hope you find a man to love you as you should be loved, or he'll be answering to me!” I meant every word I said, June deserved happiness and love.

Tears did come now, for real. June turned back toward the door and walked on. The door clicked shut behind her. My physical pain overshadowed by the emotional loss, I stood and shuffled toward the kitchen to grab a beer. Tears and beers.

A knock came a few minutes later, just as I reached the fridge, and I edged back towards the door. A snail could have overtaken me. No doubt the boys came to verbally tear me to pieces. Pulling the door open,

my jaw dropped, there stood June.

“June? What the...?” I asked, stunned.

“I’m ready” she simply said.

“So am I, Baby, so am I,” she nestled in my arms and my mouth caught hers in a memorable and long awaited kiss. I thanked the angels for returning my angel back to me. This time I would not mess up, this time I would listen to Hindsight.

Told you not to give up.

Quiet Hindsight, not now, I’m busy!

The End