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Chapter 29: Deluded

I think there's some sexual tension between Luke and me. Am I crazy to say that?

Why else would I feel like I'm electrocuted every time he touches me?

Why else would we joke about having sex?

Why else would we find excuses to hang out?

I tried to get Luke out of my head. It wasn't productive. I had classes to attend, my part-time job at the clothing store and...

That's it.

I didn't have much else going on to be honest.

"What's your name?" the barista asked me.

There I was, in the Co ee Bean by the mall, at the front of the line. Matt stood opposite the counter with his brown apron, a name tag and the ever-powerful sharpie.

I folded my arms across my chest. "Seriously? I come here almost every day Matt. You go to my school. We swapped lockers in middle school."

Not to mention, you're dating my sister

He looked at me funny. "Do you think we're friends or something?"

I glared, "Sure. Put that on my drink: Deluded."

He shrugged, and did.

So I took my 'deluded' caramel macchiato and walked across the parking lot to my car.

Just another Monday.

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"Hey boo," Julia greeted me by my locker, "Sorry I wasn't able to hang. The girls and I are so busy with back to school rituals."

She makes it sound like she's been a part of their gang all year.

"No worries. I'm sure it's been fun," I said, happy for her.

"It is. I promise I'll join you on the couch soon. You've probably been through a lot of TV shows, huh?"

"Less than you'd think," I answered truthfully, swinging my backpack onto my shoulder.

Life with Luke has kept things... interesting.

"Well we should def catch up. I can't believe I haven't asked you about summer yet. Are you still down to tutor me in calc?"

"Of course. Let me know whenever you're free," I smiled at her as the bell rang.

I was excited that Julia wanted to hang out. I missed my friend to be honest. She was trying so hard to be a part of the LUCKY group. It seemed like a full-time commitment.

But at least I was keeping busy... well, Lukewas keeping me busy. I was slowly working o the cost of his laptop, one painful annoying request at a time.

I was also about to start my a er-school job at Lola Rae, a boutique women's clothing store. I went over there at lunch time to get a training session in. The store assistant wanted to show me how to use the cash register before I started work.

Julia texted me: The girls didn't invite me to lunch today. Where on the bleachers are you?

I quickly texted back, Sorry I'm not at school.

I didn't mean to sound mysterious, but I was already late to my first appointment so I hustled to get there in time. The boutique was small and filled with gorgeous, stylish outfits.

The store assistant showed me the security cameras and said that if I had any on-the-job questions, there was a white landline phone I could use. She talked me through punctuality, closing shop and the returns policy. Then she spent the rest of the time showing me how to log inventory and use the cash register.

I was so late to my next class.

I ran into Comp Gov 20 minutes a er it started, desperately apologizing for being late. Mr Laghari saw my exasperated expression and gave me a pass. I walked to my chair, feeling a certain pair of blue eyes on me.

I stayed quiet through class until the bell rang and then I stayed behind to write our homework down. When I turned around, Luke was surrounded by other basketball players and they walked o to practice.

We live in di erent worlds.

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"Millie! Take the trash out!" my mother yelled as she applied her makeup before work.

Flora grabbed an orange juice and sped o to school. I sighed and reluctantly took the trash out. The sun was glaringly hot today and I regretted wearing a turtle neck. It was laundry day though.

I squinted as I threw the bag into the trash can.

A girl's melodic laughter dri ed through the air. I glanced across the street and saw Luke's sister walk out with a friend by her side. Her blonde hair blew in the breeze as she threw on a pair of shades. She was wearing a plunge halter jumpsuit and black sandals. She was stunning. The kind of girl who could pull o any look.

Her friend was a brunette with blonde highlights. She was wearing an oversized shirt, spandex shorts and Balenciaga sneakers.

Expensive flex at 8am on a Tuesday.

Out of nowhere, Luke's black jeep wrangler swerved onto the sidewalk and he rolled the window down. There he was. Messy black hair and aviator sunglasses. Classic.

"Get in."

"Hey," I waved at him from by the trash, "Your sister's here."

"InMillie," he growled.

"But it's stranger danger," I joked.

He was not entertaining my jokes this morning. "We're both late for school and you seem like the type to care."

Based on my desperate plea to our Comp Gov teacher a er turning up 20 minutes late yesterday, he was right.

"Are you o ering to drive me?" Because I have a car...

"What part of get indo you not understand?"

"All of it. But waita minute. I need to get my school bag. I'm not about to-"

"20 seconds." He started a countdown.

I stood there. Was Luke Dawson really picking me up for school? He was a bit aggressive about it, but this is like a dream...

"19."

Nightmare.

**

Luke's sister and his friend stared at me as I hopped into the passenger seat of his car. I sat on the smooth leather seats and stared at them through the rear-view mirror.

"What am I missing?" I asked.

I wasn't a fool. The hottest guy in school does not give rides to girls like me. And the hottest guy in myschool is extra egotistical, so he's not giving rides to anybody.

We both knew it.

"My sister likes to take on projects," he finally answered.

His steel blue eyes were focused on the road ahead. I admired his profile from the passenger seat, wondering what it would feel like to run my hands through his hair.

"What kind of projects?" I asked, trying so hard to stay focused.

"Social projects," he answered, "Like you."

"They've taken pity on me?" I clarified.

I don't take onense that easily. And I got what he was saying. His hot older sister was bored and wanted to play around with his life. Turn a nobody like me into something decently attractive.

"They want to change you," he said, "And I don't want you to change."

I replayed his words in my head, just to make sure I heard it right. I don't want you to change.

"You don't?"

He tore his eyes from the road and looked at me, "I like you as you."

Be still my beating heart...

"STOP!" I yelled out, looking past the hot guy to a co ee bean logo, "I'm sorry to interrupt our moment because it's the nicest thing you've ever said to me and I literally died a little inside, but we just passed my morning co ee and... we can't do that."

He stared at me with a look that said seriously.

I stared back.

He sighed and pulled over.

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"One caramel macchiato please and a-" I ordered excitedly, and turned to Luke.

Luke sighed, arms folded across his chest. "A cold brew."

Boring.

Matt, the barista who never remembers my name, was staring at Luke Maww in shock. He knew Luke. Everyone knew Luke. He just had no idea what Luke was doing here with me.

"Hello?" I waved at Matt.

He snapped out of it, "Sure can do, Luke Dawson! We have seasonal cold brews you may like to try, free of charge. A Marvelous Mint or Choco Mocha."

Luke didn't want to be here in the first place. He especially didn't want marvelous mochas or sparkles on his drink.

He repeated in a cold don't-ask-me-again voice, "I'll have the cold brew."

Matt pinged our orders into the cash register, "Alrighty, that'll be \$7.80. Are you paying together?"

"Yes and I'mpaying," I said, pulling out my wallet, "Consider it a deduction from the laptop."

Luke swiped my hand away and pulled out his credit card, "That's not how our deal works. I don't let you pay for drinks."

I raised an eyebrow. "You can take your card and stu your outdated macho mojo up your-" a woman in the line behind us coughed, "-and let me pay back what I owe you. This is the twenty-first century and I am in debt to no one. Freedom, dude. It's in the Constitution."

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"So that'll be \$7.80."

I glared at Matt. Way to ruin my grand speech. But I forked the cash over anyway and we walked to the counter to wait for our drinks.

We were handed two cups. Luke gave me one.

"How do you know this one is mine?"

"I'm pretty sure mine doesn't say 'deluded' on it."

He showed me the cup. Sure enough, instead of my name, was the word 'Deluded.' Matt hadn't forgotten this time.

I looked back at Luke. He was smiling.

Then he said, "Do you want to look it up in the constitution?"