

## 45 | Blackout

### Chapter 45: Blackout

I was losing my head. Jake Dawson asked me on a date.

And Luke Dawson wanted to kill me for it.

I tried not to think about Luke, but people kept saying his name. He's hard to escape. I felt like Luke hurt me. We had shared sensitive moments together. I know we never kissed but I'm not oblivious. Almost-kisses count. The almost-romantic conversations count.

The there's no quitting and the I'll protect you until you don't need melines were lies if he could say them and then say we barely knew each other like he said to me yesterday.

I had poured my feelings out to him yesterday and he didn't even bother to address it - he just greeted Jamie and invited her into his home.

At 10PM.

I don't know what they did or did not do that night, but a girl going over to a guy's house alone at 10PM is a flirty move. And it's disrespectful since he's been flirting with me.

I won't take that.

So he can stay with Jamie and stay behaving the way I always expected him to. He's a player.

And I don't play games.

People were talking to me like they knew me now, like we'd been friends for years. They wanted to know every detail about my life - especially if it was scandalous.

High school is so fake: Yesterday, no one cared I existed.

Truthfully, it felt good at first. People were being nice to me. That's a rare and pleasant feeling. But then, I realized that they were digging for all the dirt on me. Unfortunately for them, there's not much. I've lived a very boring life before this summer.

It became overwhelming. There was not a single friendly face in the crowd. I couldn't concentrate with all the whispers. Everyone was staring at me; I felt like I had a giant zit on my face.

This wasn't how I wanted things to go down. I liked my anonymity.

I think.

"What does she have on him? It must be blackmail because there's no way he could naturally be attracted to her."

"There's nothing natural about Millie and Jake."

"Wasn't Luke in the hallway with her last week? How does she know him? It's insane."

Those were the sentences I overheard wherever I went. It's like they waited to talk about me when I was present, just so I could hear the cruel words.

I needed somewhere to breathe. I wanted space. The combo of losing my trust in Luke, Jake asking me on a date and the school abaze with my name was too much. I needed time to heal/process/get used to this.

At lunch time, I panicked. The gossip, the stares, the cruelty. It was too much. All this attention was like a shock to my system. I ran out into the car park and rushed to my car. If I can just get away, everyone can calm down I started the engine and looked up.

Luke Dawson was standing in front of my car.

Somehow, he knew I'd be making a run for it.

"We need to talk."

I shook my head. The last time I saw him was at his house, when I threatened to run him over. I was in a really good position to follow through with that now.

"Get out of the car, Millie," he said, pulling the door open.

I slammed it shut again. I stared up at him through the glass window. He made a sign for me to open, but I refused. I couldn't face him.

I revved my old cranky engine and powered out of there as fast as this ancient metal box could go. Which was not that fast. I made it on the open road but then the sound of a motorbike roared behind me.

My heart stopped. I saw a sleek black bike speed into my rearview mirror. The driver was in a black helmet with a red stripe on the side.

Jake.

What is it with the Dawson brothers? Why couldn't they leave me alone?

I stopped the car and he caught up to me in a second flat. I opened the door and stepped out. Jake was not Luke.

I don't even know what that means anymore.

He took his helmet off and his hair cascaded over his eyes. He swept it aside and his hands wrapped themselves around my arms.

"Listen to me Millie, what happened today wasn't fair on you. The school has practically erupted from the news and I didn't want to put any pressure on you."

I looked away. I couldn't look into his eyes because I knew I'd cry.

"I'm sorry for causing this, Millie. I'm still new here and I didn't know our school was so weird," his tone was soft and gentle with me, "What everyone's saying about you is unfair."

I slowly looked into his eyes.

"You're beautiful," he said, "Inside and out."

Jake's voice was melodic and soothing. He was apologizing for something he hadn't even done. I gazed into his hazel brown eyes and he slowly leant forward. The breath caught in my throat. So I, and very slowly, his lips touched mine.

It was a soft and gentle kiss but I felt like I'd been electrocuted. I took a minute to react, ignoring the tingling sensations that cascaded through my body. I jumped out of his arms, back into my car and switched the engine. I pressed the gas and sped out of there.

This was too much for me. This was all too much.

I left Jake Dawson in the dust behind me.

I couldn't bear to look back. I didn't want to see his face. I remembered how one of his tattoos was a black heart. I really hope that wasn't the color of mine.

The kiss. This kiss. My mind was replaying those last few seconds over and over in my head until...

Until...

My tire burst and smoke started to come out of it. My car broke down. And then I broke down.

And there was only one person I could call.

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"Mom?" I sobbed into the phone.

You've reached the answering machine to-

I hung up. I didn't have a spare tire, I couldn't afford calling for roadside assistance and I didn't have anyone to call. Literally no one. I was stuck.

I looked at my phone and dialed his number.

"Hello?"

"It's me. My car broke down by Route 23. Can you pick me up?"

"I'll be there."

He hung up. I sat on the sidewalk, staring at my phone. Random messages were popping up from people I didn't even know. How did they get my number?

I didn't know what to think anymore. All those other people were like noise, clouding out what really mattered. There were people in my life who really mattered. My family, Julia, the Dawson brothers. Two brothers. Two hot brothers with opposing qualities that were both entirely attractive.

One who tried to kiss me.

Me. The ugly one. The one they call unkillable.

Did he mean it?

Did he think he could just kiss me and that I'd fall into his arms because he's popular and I'm not?

And what did I feel about the other? Was it fair to go on a date with one when I had some kind of twisted feelings for the other?

His car came into view. The doors unlocked and he stepped out. When my own car had broken down, his number was the one I called. It was instinct. I may regret it.

"Mills! Are you okay? Tell me you're OK," Luke ran towards me and his hands gripped my waist, his eyes scouring my body for any scratches or bruises.

I had none. All my bruises were psychological.

Ok, I'll stop with the melodrama.

I've gotten used to Luke being there for me. He's been there for me in some pretty rough times recently. My instinct remembered that but, as my emotions calmed down and my crying stopped, I remembered just how angry I was with him.

"I'm fine," I said, "My engine stopped working, that's all."

Luke looked deeply into my eyes and held my gaze. "This is one of those moments where you say you're fine and you're physically hurt."

"Fine," I exhaled, and rearranged my words, "I am not physically hurt by my car breaking down."

Those were facts.

Luke's blue eyes poured into mine, in a display of emotion that I didn't know he had. If I meant so much to him, why would he still have the coach's daughter on speed-dial?

Maybe not on speed-dial, but near enough that she swings by whenever she wants.

I've been cheated on before. My heart's been crushed into a million pieces and I don't want to expose myself like that again. I'm scared.

Anyway, I digress. Back to Luke in this moment. He knew that I was a bad liar and when he saw the truth in my eyes, his concerned expression changed to annoyance.

"What is wrong with you?!" he snapped at me.

His gentle grip on my waist released and he raised his hands to his head in frustration. His beautiful eyes flashed a deep blue.

"How could you even think of accepting a date with my brother? He's doing this to get back at me. He knows what you mean to me."

He stopped and glanced back at me, to see if I had caught his slip up. I had.

"What do I mean to you?" I asked him.

I'd like to know.

I think we'd all like to know.

We were standing in the middle of an open road, arguing like two crazy people. It's a miracle no car had passed us by.

His tone so ened, "I get the feeling you're still mad at me but I don't know why."

"You don't know why?!" I raised my hands in the air, "One minute you're being sweet and sensitive. And the next, you're the asshole everyone knows. So which one is it?"

That way he looked at me removed me from my senses. Luke does that - he stops people in their tracks.

"I want to be someone you like, Millie, but it's taking me time," he answered, "I'm not used to this. You have such high standards and the reality is, that I'm me. This is me caring about you and if it's not enough."

I shook my head, not being able to take this emotion right now, "It's not enough."

I'm not ready. I don't want to be disrespectful, and I don't want to be forced into a relationship if I'm not ready. Why should Luke have to change for me? Changing's a difficult and painful process. I don't want to make him go through that and I don't want him to blame me for it either.

Of course I want to be loved. But I won't blindly walk into a relationship that I don't feel will be a stable one. Luke has been amazing in many ways, but am I really going to just forget the hell he called me 'ugly' a few or someone he barely knew? The easy thing would be to say 'yes', but I'm not looking for the easy route. I'm looking for a route that can lead me to become strong and confident.

Sometimes I feel pressured by society to think that 'having a boyfriend' is everything. I feel pressured to doubt myself if I don't want to jump into Luke's arms a few weeks after he ignored my existence at school and a month after he called me ugly. I don't accept that pressure.

I don't need another half to be whole.

EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP. A car honked on the highway and sped past us, dangerously close. We moved to the left side of my car.

"Let's rewind what you said," I told him, as I caught him glancing down the road to check if any more cars were coming.

He positioned me closer to my car door so I was away from the danger.

"We were talking about Jake," I repeated, "You said you think he's asking me out to get back at you."

"I mean..." Luke raised a hand casually, "That's one working theory."

Jake has never been rude or mean to me. At the very least, that should be a good thing. Why am I being forced to doubt that? So Luke can be an ass sometimes, but that makes him more genuine?

I don't want to make excuses for good looking guys.

My response was nowhere near as lighthearted. "So this is all about you? Jake could never like me for me; he's getting back at you? You've always had a big ego, Luke, but you need a reality check. You're not a big part of my world."

"No?" he mocked me, "Then why didn't you call Jake?"

I paused, drinking in the inhumanly handsome view that was Luke Dawson. He knew how to get me.

"I didn't want Jake to see me like this. I'm a mess."

Shockingly, those words deflated Luke. He said, "And you don't care what I think."

"No I don't. You've already seen me at my worst."

Luke ran a hand through his hair. He turned his back to me, breathed in and sighed, "Damn it Millie, why aren't you like the other girls? I'm the perfect one. Not Jake."

"And that, right there, is the arrogance that penetrates your perfection."

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I sat in Luke's car. He had a spare tire in his trunk and was working on changing my flat tire now. My car's hazard lights were on and I watched him replace the hubcap.

I didn't speak to him once.

He didn't offer up any jokes either.

I'm not his mother. Why should I be the one to explain how he needs to behave? If he can't figure it out on his own, then I don't need to show him. I get so emotional with Luke. Truthfully, I had wanted him so badly to be the one...

My emotions were toying with me. My head was saying one thing and my heart was saying another.

After half an hour, he'd finally finished. His sleeves were rolled up and his arms were dirty. He stowed the jack, lug wrench and my flat tire before coming to me.

"Thank you," I said.

"I'm sure you still think I'm a self-centered jerk, but you're welcome."

I rolled my eyes, "Come on, you have to know that already. This can't be news."

He didn't react.

Had I gone too far? Had I actually hurt him? I didn't think it was possible.

This was tense now. We sat in silence. Not even music was playing. And we loved listening to music together... usually.

I wanted to hear what he'd been listening to. There were so many new songs I wanted to show him. And now I couldn't.

I didn't understand this. Usually when I insult him he knocks me back with another insult, no problem. I wasn't used to him being so affected by what I said. Is it because of what Jake had done?

And Luke didn't even know about the kiss yet.

Even though I was angry at him, I hated the idea that he was upset with me. Somehow, I was totally fine with him being pissed off at me. Angry - yes. Annoyed - yes. Sad - no, never.

Time was up now anyway. My car had been fixed and I could go home.

I gave up on saying something to Luke and pushed the door open. I was about to hop out of his car when he touched my arm. I turned to him. He did look perfect, godly even, and his touch sent fireworks through my arm.

"Even arrogant jerks need friends," he said.

I think my heart stopped. And I took a long moment to process.

"Are you asking me to be your friend, Luke Dawson?"

This was a first. Luke was known for being arrogant, athletic, attractive. But whenever he one to ask for this. "Gods have fans, not friends." That's what people say about him.

I think this is for the best. I have made a mess out of the situation now myself. After getting upset with Luke, I accepted a date with Jake - a date I should never have accepted under current circumstances. I'm not ready for any of this, and the best thing is for me to step back.

"I thought I already had," he admitted sheepishly, "Now I don't know."

He didn't elaborate further and I couldn't take any more. I've entertained a lot of his games but this one hurt too close to the heart. Did he not even want to be friends?

I got out of the car.

"Wait. Millie, wait. If having you around means being a friend to you, then yes, that's what I want."

"That's what you want?"

"I want you. Why is that so hard to believe?"

And that's when a wasp flew through the window and stung my cheek.

I screamed, jumping up, knocking my head against the window pane and falling flat onto the sidewalk. I blacked out.

**A/N: I'm going to say nothing. I just know you'll be coming at me for that one :D**

**But the drama dialed up in this chapter, didn't it? And we'll keep on dialing :) Please remember to vote if you enjoyed the chapter!**