

06 | Black Market Milkshakes

I am so grateful to every one of you who took the time to comment and vote. Because you did, I made this chapter super long (long for me anyway).

Chapter 6: Black Market Milkshakes

Luke Dawson said I owed him a favor. But the way this was shaping up, it looked like he was doing me the favor. I mean, come on: I'm at The Surfside Shack with the two hottest boys. We're talking milkshakes and man-candy.

People were drooling over them, eyeing them as if they were on the menu. Austin grabbed a towel and dried himself down. He put a shirt on and I saw a girl creep up from behind to steal his towel.

These boys had fans. I never really realized it since I'm not very social. All I see of Luke Dawson's life is from my bedroom window. I'd see the cars pick him up for parties and the girls line up at his front door.

But for the first time, I was out with him.

We sat in a booth at the corner of the restaurant, trying to avoid all the attention. People kept crowding the booth to talk to Luke and Austin. Everyone either knew them or seemed to know of them. And the boys weren't thrilled about it.

I, on the other hand, was having a great time.

"Can I have the chocolate coconut milkshake with the toasted marshmallow whipped cream and extra cherries please?" I smiled up at our waiter.

I scanned the menu in my hands to see if anything else was calling my name. When visiting the beach, seas the day That's how I sea it.

"Ooh, the watermelon wave looks fun. Can I have one of those too?"

Luke grabbed the menu out of my hands, "Ok, that's enough. We'll have two coronas."

"You didn't need the menu for that," I sulked at his boring order.

"Chill out on the girl, Dawson," Austin defended me, "She's doing you a favor."

I'm liking him more and more.

"It's the other way round," Luke answered, slipping his ID back into his pocket.

"But we don't need to go into the details!" I chimed in.

Partly because I wanted to seem like a nice girl to Austin who was a nice guy. And mostly because the truth would involve admitting that I'm a bad driver, which is JUST NOT TRUE. Remember the raccoon story. Never forget the raccoon story.

"Just know that I saved a raccoon's life once," I said.

"Why does that story keep coming up?" Luke exclaimed.

"Because," I calmly stated in a very professional and matter-of-fact way, "it's always relevant. More importantly, why do you get so frustrated about it?"

"You have an unhealthy obsession with raccoons."

"Do you hate animals?"

"Guys," Austin tried to intervene. He failed.

"Do you have a life?"

"Do you have a soul?"

"Guys!" Austin banged his hand against the table to stop our death glares, "We have a job to do here so let's try to focus. Tell her the story Luke. She needs to know what's going on before she gets involved."

The waiter interrupted us, setting two coronas and a giant milkshake on the table. The whipped cream formed a tower on top, with four red cherries poking out of the white surface. Heaven in a soda glass.

I stuck a green straw into it and slurped the creamy deliciousness.

Like I said, I don't go out much - mostly because I have no one to go out with. I don't have many friends, apart from Julie, but she's vegetarian and vegan and allergic to dairy/my favorite foods so this wouldn't be a location we'd hit up.

"Millie," Luke said my name. He sounded frustrated, "Can you stop slurping loudly."

I looked up, straw in mouth, innocently drinking my chocolate-coconut-with-cherries-on-top milkshake. "You're the Grinch."

Luke rolled his eyes, "Hardcore insult right there."

"The Grinch ruined Christmas."

"Almost."

"GUYS! Come on! What did I just say? You keep going on in your own world. You both sound crazy." Austin was mature, and probably right.

"She's."

"He's."

Luke cut me off, "Obviously you're not here because we enjoy your company. I'm in trouble. Last season I was betting on my own basketball games. I figured I was winning so much, I might as well make a few bucks out of it."

"That's illegal you know. It's insider trading," I said.

"We're not on Wall Street. This is high school basketball," Luke defended himself.

I was still surprised. I hadn't expected him to do that. It's wrong. Flat out wrong.

"I was against it from the beginning," Austin put his two cents in, "Just so we're all clear about that."

"Austin never does the right thing but he always preaches it," Luke commented.

"That's why we're friends."

I was starting to feel a little out of place. No matter how much of a jerk Luke was, his friendship with Austin was real. Their loyalty went way beyond high school popularity. It had nothing to do with it. They trusted each other and that was admirable.

"And as usual, Luke's master plans bite us more than they please us."

Luke smirked, "Like your girls."

Burn.

Austin was le to defend his taste in women while I relished the taste of my creamy milkshake. The vibe was relaxed between us and I liked it. I continued slurping. Luke glared at me.

I stopped slurping. Grinch.

He continued the story, "I started betting against this one guy, until he lost big. Things got out of control and that's why we're here today. We're settling this. A small down payment and then we're done for good. I'll play basketball the right way from now on."

Two wrongs don't make a right. In his twisted way, Luke was trying to straighten himself out. But I could tell he seeks out trouble. I couldn't tell if that made him hotter.

It probably definitely did.

"That brings you in," Austin took over, wrapping the story up, "Apart from us, no one knows about this. Luke has a lot riding on this year, with college apps and all that. A lot of guys are jealous of him and, if they found out, they'd use it against him. You're the perfect person to help. You're nowhere near our social scene."

"You're like a piranha to our social scene," Luke said.

"I get the picture," I snapped back.

Austin laughed. "You two should get a... Basically Millie, you're in the getaway car. When we come out running, you're driving."

I sat there.

"Do you want out?" Austin offered kindly, "Because you're under no obligation."

"Actually, she is."

"Luke, she doesn't need to be in your mess if she doesn't want to," Austin turned to me with his beautiful eyes, "What do you say?"

They stared at me. It was a lot to soak in. A big responsibility.

"If I'm the getaway car driver..." I slowly repeated, "That means you think I'm a good driver."

Luke gave up, wishing he was anywhere but dealing with me.

I didn't let him go that easy, smiling from ear to ear, "What convinced you? Was it the raccoon story?"

"Don't you have a milkshake to drink?"

"You like the sound of that, don't you?"

Austin banged his head on the table.

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So, the plan was in place. I sat in Luke's jeep, ready to drive us out of there. Austin and Luke were meeting with the other gamblers in the Surfside Shack.

Honestly, I was nervous. Being the getaway car driver was a big deal. This favor was worth way more than \$50. They were in such deep issshand I wanted no part of it.

What is Luke's life?

I put the AC on high since it was so hot outside. Condensed water droplets were starting to roll down the side of my milkshake cup.

"Drat, I forgot napkins!"

Yeah, failure to put things in perspective - I know. I forgot all about my role as the getaway car driver and returned to the Shack.

"Hey," I waved at the bartender, squished between two girls in bikinis, "Excuse me. Hello! Over here."

The bartender finally gave me some attention. "What do you want?"

"Napkins please. I'm in my friend's car and I don't want to get this drink all over the seats. It's so hot outside and if I spill it the car will start to smell, and I have to buy an air freshener."

"Save your life story," the bartender said, throwing me a large stack of napkins, since she didn't want me coming back.

The bikini girls were laughing at me. I didn't let it bother me, since I was used to it.

I was about to head back to the car when a man swung round on the bar stool and grabbed my wrist. "Were you with those boys over there?"

I looked him up and down. He was in a black bomber jacket, which was weird considering it was like 80 degrees outside. It totally didn't fit in with the laid back, surfer style that everyone else was rocking.

"What's it to you?" I asked, getting even more nervous and jittery.

My palms were beginning to sweat or maybe that was the heat. Did I mention it was 80 degrees in here?

"Listen kid, I asked you about your situation."

Oh my god, he was talking like a guy out of a mafia movie. I couldn't handle this. I do not get involved in action. That's more Luke's domain. I watch action flicks on my couch with a tub of ice cream. Sugar gives my blood pressure enough stress.

"My... my situation?"

He stared me down. It was terrifying. It was also a tactic to get me to talk. And oh boy did that work.

I stuttered, which led to uncontrollable rambling. I should probably get that checked out.

"Are you trying to sell me an illegal air freshener because I can get that over the counter, like this milkshake. I don't buy my milkshakes on the black market. And you can replace the word milkshake for anything I ever buy because I always buy my products the legal way."

"You got a sense of humor on you. Working my job, we don't get that much on."

Ok. He just complimented me. I don't hear compliments very often.

"I'm touched you say that, because I feel most people don't appreciate my humor. I mean, I don't think I'm funny, but people always laugh at me. It hurts my feelings."

"You got issues, kid. Comedy is a good way to funnel that shit to pull up a chair." He literally knocked a guy out the stool next to him. Give me space to sit. "I go to this comedy club downtown once in a while. I give a little standup, do my thing."

"Really? That's so cool. I watch Kat Williams videos online."

"Do you have a pen?" he looked at the bartender, "PEN." The bartender immediately served it without any of the attitude she'd given me. Then, leather jacket guy pulled out an old receipt and scribbled something on the back, "I'll write down the address and next time you're in that corner."

Suddenly there was a bang and a crash. Chairs flew across the wall and tables were overturned.

"GET TO THE CAR AUSTIN!" Luke's voice yelled loud and clear.

I looked over and saw them jump over booths, plates crashing on the floor as they ran towards the front door. They were making their getaway.

Luke reached the door first but he turned around for Austin, who hopped on a table and landed on his feet seconds later. A man lunged towards Austin and I felt my heart lurch. Luke pushed Austin out of the way and received a blow to his shoulder instead. He didn't cry out in pain - he looked pissed.

Angry Luke was not someone I wanted to mess with. With incredible reflex, he knocked the guy out cold. I stared.

"START THE CAR MILLIE!"

Oops.

I was the getaway plan... but I wasn't there to help them getaway.

"I have to go!" I said.

I jumped on the chair and squeezed between onlookers and the crazy guys they were fighting. I pushed my way out, because no one ever pays attention to me - least of all now.

"WHERE IS SHE?!" Luke yelled, by the empty car.

"WHAT THE HELL?! I CAN'T OPEN THE DOOR!"

"I'M GOING TO KILL THAT-"

"LUKE, BEHIND YOU!"

A rush of bad guys ambushed them, but Luke and Austin knew how to fight. I watched them defend and counter strike amidst the chaos, standing back-to-back so they could cover each other.

Time out. You know when you're sitting at home watching the discovery channel and you're like 'cheetah's fight and gazelle's choose flight but if I was in this situation which one would I be? Well I've always wanted to know that too. And it turns out, I'd be a headless chicken (did I mention that was an option?).

I was standing there; feeling stupid and scared and worried and confused and upset and anxious...

So I literally walked into the fight hoping to stop it.

"Please make peace. Guys stop. Hey. Ow. You're hurting me. Ow. OW! OOOOOOWWWW!"

I was swept up in the undercurrents and knocked around. Supremely painful. Beyond words.

"LUKE!" I screamed, "LUKE!"

He suddenly realized that I was in the pits with him. From this vantage point, I could now see how much stronger Luke was than the others. He was taking on three grown men at once. Suddenly I felt his strong arms around my waist. Without speaking, he pulled me behind him, sheltering me between the car and his body.

I tried not to reach out to touch the muscles as they rippled across his back. He used his strength to his advantage and fought with skill & technique. I felt safe. In the middle of this crazy fight, I felt protected.

"ENOUGH!" The guy in the bomber jacket interrupted everything.

The men stopped fighting as if he had just announced a car sale. Austin, Luke and I were even more confused by who bomber jacket guy was.

"Where's the girl?" he asked, wading through the fight, pushing people aside.

Sheltered behind Luke's body, I squeaked, "Here."

One of the men came over. "The boss is asking for ya. Get out here."

He tried to grab me but Luke immediately blocked him. "Touch her and I'll take you down."

The man backed down, leaving Mr bomber jacket face-to-face with Luke.

"That's my comedic muse you've got there," he said and looked around Luke's shoulder at me, "You feelin' ok, kid?"

I could feel Luke and Austin both staring at me.

"I'm ok, thanks."

"Good. I never got to give you the piece of paper I was writing on. Here you go. It's at the Laughing Heads bar. You'll see me perform some time ok?"

"Sure. I have a lot of time. My social calendar is empty so... "I'll check it out?"

This was awkward. Everyone was looking at us now.

Bomber jacket dude turned to his guys, who were all bruised and battered courtesy of Luke and Austin.

"I don't feel angry anymore. Consider our debts with these boys settled. The kid plays a good game of basketball. Next time, we'll bet on him. Call it even and get outta here."

And just like that, they picked up their stuff and scattered. We were alone in the parking. Austin looked at me like I was growing antlers out of my head. I wish I was - then I may have had a flight reaction and run far away.

"Are you hurt?" Luke asked me, his eyes trailing all over me to see if I had a scratch.

"No."

His eyes locked with mine, "Then what the hell were you thinking?" His tone had changed quickly.

Before things between us got any more heated, Austin intervened, "Was I hearing things or did he call Millie his comedic muse?"

A/N: One of the most fun chapters I've written. If you're flipping through content on Instagram, consider checking us out-

Instagram: NatalieInACorner

I'll try to bring this chapter full circle by wishing you all to "seas the day" and week and anything else you may feel like seas-ing. See you on IG!