

Charlotte and the Seven Frat Brothers by Jessica Carter

Chapter 1

CHARLOTTE

"I am truly sorry, miss," the school's administrator apologizes for the fifth time. I nibble on my bottom lip, weighing my choices.

I can either take the offer the school is now presenting, or live back at home with my parents and deal with a three-hour commute. I prop my elbows on the desk and lean over to whisper so no one around will hear.

"So, for the next semester, I would have to live in a frat house?"

"That is correct, but if an opening does become available, we will transfer you. That is the best I can do for you."

"Okay. I'll do it." My voice is barely above a whisper.

The administrator busies herself getting all the paperwork ready for me to sign. Twenty minutes later, I have keys to the frat house in one hand and my suitcase in the other.

Walking through the campus, I see how happy everyone looks, carrying their belongings to the dorms they're supposed to be in, and it makes me a little sour.

I trudge forward, looking straight ahead at my prison for a semester or less. It's my last year in college, and I want it to be as perfect as the first year.

Yeah, right.

My phone rings. It's my best friend Raven.

"Where are you?" she asks.

"Hello to you too."

"Uh-huh, hi, now where are you? I have some snotty bit—girl moving her things into our room."

"Oh crap, I should have called you when I left the administrative building. Somehow all the dorm rooms got filled, and now I am staying at Croakington House."

I hear her gasp and everything went silent.

“Raven, are you still there?”

“Yeah, yeah. I just think I heard you wrong. It sounded like you said you are staying at Croakington House—which is a frat house.”

“You heard me right...”

“It’s only guys who live there, and by guys I mean the hottest players to bless the campus and football team.”

“Yes,” I say as I roll my eyes at her being so dramatic, “I know what a frat is and I know who lives at Croakington, and I know what a hot guy is.”

“And, don’t forget who else lives there - Chase Tucker, your middle school crush. Ohmigee, Char Char, you can totally be with him.”

She knows she’s not supposed to speak of Chase. It was part of our best friend pact. Chase was a no-go zone for anything. *He was someone I used to know.*

“I’m sure none of them will be happy to have me as a new roomy, least of all Chase Tucker, but Martha in the office said she will call me ASAP when another dorm is free, hopefully soon.”

“Wow, I would hate to be in your shoes right now. Kidding, I would love to be in your shoes. They’re all so hot. So, what are you going to do when you get there?”

“I was thinking I might cook them a bomb meal, to say hello and thank you and make sure they don’t kill me in my sleep,” I joke.

“I’m pretty sure they won’t kill you in your sleep.” She laughs. “I mean, that does sound like a great idea though, cooking for them. Maybe throw in some cleaning while you’re at it.”

“Hey, why not?” I say sarcastically.

“You know what?”

“What?”

“You are like the new modern-day Snow White.”

“Ha ha ha, very funny.”

“No seriously, you are living in a house with seven guys and you are about to cook and clean for them. If you are lucky one or two of them might want to bang you!”

“I guess I don’t remember that part of Snow White. Bye, Raven, I’ll call you later.”

“Bye, Charlotte *White*.”

I pull the suitcase up the porch steps and take a deep breath before unlocking the door.

The house reeks of stale sweat and old pizza. Dirty jerseys are strewn over chairs, cleats dumped in corners.

A closet door is open and I swear the only thing in there is protein powder tubs. A deflated football sits in a pot next to a plant that died long ago.

I hear talking coming from what I assume to be the living room and walk in that general direction.

Seven athletic, handsome, and muscular guys lounge around on mismatched furniture that looks like it was salvaged from various garage sales. They’re all dressed in athletic gear. A couple don’t have shirts on.

Abs... So many abs...

Raven is gonna love visiting me.

They talk animatedly about the first party of the year and how epic it will be.

I clear my throat and the room gets quiet as all eyes turn towards me. A few of them blatantly check me out, eyes scanning from head to toe with lazy grins.

And then there’s Chase—his eyes land on me for the briefest second before he looks away with a dismissive scoff, like I’m nothing more than a mild inconvenience.

Chase Tucker is tall and muscular, a body sculpted by the football gods. Or his strength coach. Sharp blue eyes and messy dark hair complete the annoyingly handsome picture. Chase Tucker knows exactly how attractive he is. And worse, he knows how to use it.

Be cool, Charlotte. It’s just boys.

“Hi, I’m Charlotte,” I wave.

One of the guys sprawled on the couch doesn’t even look up. “Party’s not till tonight, doll face.”

Doll face? Oh, hell no.

I shoot him a glare. “Yeah, I’m not here for the party. I’m your new roommate. The office lady was supposed to call? Ringing any bells?”

That gets their attention. The room explodes—not at me, but at each other.

I look around, keeping a tight smile on my face. The room erupts in yelling, not at me but at the situation. I watch them as they point fingers at one another.

A loud whistle rings throughout the room and everyone quiets down. They turn their attention to the black-haired guy, now standing. He looks at Chase before speaking, like he’s asking for permission. Chase nods, goes back to gazing out the window.

Hmm... Guess Chase is the alpha male on and off the field.

“I’m Darren Reed. You must know who I am...” He looks behind him to the rest of the guys. “Hell, you ought to know who we all are.”

Yes, I’ve *seen* them around campus, the cheerleaders hanging onto them for dear life. I know they are football players, but that’s where it ends.

I major in culinary arts. If I’m not in class or doing homework, I’m in the school kitchen or at home cooking, coming up with new recipes.

“I’m sorry, I don’t.” I put my hand back to my side. It was mostly the truth—I didn’t actually *know* them.

The guys’ faces scrunch up, not believing me. Eighty percent of the female population has been with at least one of the seven, that is a fact. They think the rest are just waiting in line for their turn.

“Surely this is a mistake that you’re here. I can fix this,” Darren says as he extends his hand. I shake it skeptically.

“I’m not sure what you think you can fix. I’ve *tried* to fix it already, tried to fix it so much, because I sure as hell don’t want to live with seven dudes, but you’re welcome to try and fix it.”

“You see, there’s been a bit of miscommunication,” Darren says. “Old lady Martha said we were getting a student by the name of Charley. We assumed it was a guy.”

“You shouldn’t assume things, and my nickname is Charley, short for Charlotte.” I tuck a strand of hair behind my ear. “Now, can you show me to my room?”

“First, meet the guys.”

I nod, walking farther into the living room, leaving my suitcase behind.

“Everett Sawyer at your service, *doll face*. I’m majoring in business, and I’m a linebacker.” Once he’s done, he pulls out his phone—texting away.

I tap the screen of his phone, grabbing his attention.

“What the hell?” he says, looking up at me.

“You may either call me Charley or Charlotte. ‘Doll face’ is unacceptable and downright sexist. I am not a crazed feminist, but there are some things I just won’t allow, and that’s the unnecessary name-calling.”

“I like her,” the guy next to him says. “Tristan Beckett, majoring in business as well, with my twin brother here,” he looks to his left. They are identical.

“Vincent.” He just nods. I am assuming he is the quiet twin. “We are also on the school’s football team. I would tell you our positions, but I doubt you would know it.” Tristan shrugs.

“And over here to your left...” Darren redirects my attention to the other side of the living room. The last three guys sitting down looking uninterested in me, or it could be life in general.

I make my way to that side as Chase stands up. He extends his hand. I place mine into his. The moment our skin touches, a jolt of electricity shoots up my arm. I hate that I feel it—*that spark*. It’s been years, and still, he has this ridiculous hold on me. Why does Chase do this to me?

“I am Chase Tucker, quarterback, team captain, and head of this household.”

Why is he introducing himself, like we don’t know each other? I yank my hand back like it burns. The nerve of him.

“Yeah, I know who you are, Chase. We went to middle school together,” I say, crossing my arms.

Chase gives a shrug, eyes cool. “I forgot.”

Get over yourself, dude.

He continues, “I personally spoke to Martha and I guess I should have asked if Charley was a male or female, even though it seemed obvious.”

I roll my eyes at his jab at my name.

“None of that is important, because you are here now, to stay, I guess,” he says, as if it’s the worst thing that ever happened in the history of the universe. “To my right are my

left- and right-hand men, Miguel Jackson and Austin Kramer. We all major in business and are on the football team.”

“I’m SO impressed,” I say.

“Let’s go over the house rules. One, knock on every door before entering. Two, don’t touch my stuff. Three, stay quiet at night, because we train early and need our sleep. Four, no pink shit in the house. Five, no overnight guests. Six…”

I cut in, raising an eyebrow. “So, you guys never have girls over at night? Sure…”

Chase scoffs. “Of course we do. That rule’s for you—no strange dudes in the house.”

“Very fair rule,” I say with as much disdain as possible.

“Rule six, clean up after yourself.”

I nod at the moldy pizza box in the corner and say, “Does anyone follow that one?”

“Rule seven,” Chase says, “no dating anyone in the house. We don’t need the drama or the distraction from football.”

Chase casts a long glance at the guys flanking him—Miguel nods once, Austin smirks like he already knows something I don’t. Then Chase turns back to me with an infuriating smirk.

Then he claps and points toward the front door. “Everyone head to practice. I’ll be five minutes behind you after I help our SURPRISE guest find her room.”

The guys stand up and practically march out, following Chase’s orders like he’s a general. Chase leads me upstairs in silence, not bothering to glance back or offer help with my bags.

He stops at a door, pushes it open, and gestures inside with all the enthusiasm of someone introducing a dungeon. “Here you go,” he says flatly.

The bed inside looks like it might collapse if I breathe too hard, and I already have claustrophobia from the low ceiling.

“Home sweet home,” I mutter under my breath.

“The bathroom is right through that door. We’ll be sharing it.”

“What? Can I get another one? I don’t want to share a bathroom with you.” I look at him like he is crazy.

“Oh yeah,” Chase says, voice dripping with sarcasm. “Oh yeah, another rule, try not to leave your tampons out.”

I shoot him a glare.

“Just remember rule one, knock before barging in, and we’ll be fine.”

“Aren’t frat houses supposed to be fun?” I mutter. “What’s with all the military-grade rules?”

“We might be a frat house, but we take our football and our studies seriously. So you should take our rules seriously. Especially the last one - no dating a housemate.”

“That won’t be a problem,” I say, crossing my arms.

Chase grins, clearly not buying it. “You sure? A house full of hot football players might not be as easy to resist as you think.”

“Trust me,” I say with a wrinkle of my nose, “the protein farts alone will keep me at bay.”

“Picture this,” Chase says, leaning casually against the hallway wall next to me. “You spend every day with one of us, maybe Miguel or Austin. Late nights, close quarters, constant proximity—suddenly, you start to catch feelings.”

I scoff. “The only feeling I’m catching is dread.”

He shrugs, unfazed. “Then one night, you both end up in the hallway, like now. It’s late. It’s quiet. He leans in...”

Chase shifts, putting his arm against the wall right next to my head. His voice drops to a whisper. “And the guy starts telling you how he has a crush on you. Says he loves seeing you around the house. Maybe...”—he leans closer, his breath warm against my ear—“maybe he loves how you smell.”

Then he actually leans in and sniffs my hair, slow and exaggerated. His exhale brushes against my neck, sending a jolt down my spine that I do my best to hide.

“And what would you do,” Chase murmurs, more intimate, “if that guy asked to kiss you?”

He leans in so his lips are just inches from mine.

Is this still part of his little scenario? Or am I about to kiss my middle school crush on my first night in a frat house?

This definitely didn’t happen in *Snow White*...

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