

Charlotte and the Seven Frat Brothers |

Chapter 25

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CHARLOTTE

I've been trying to calm myself down for the past twenty minutes. Nothing seems to be working. My parents have never seen me flip out or throw a tantrum, and I don't want to start now.

I just stare at Chase across the table and mentally pray he chokes on his dinner. I don't know if I should really be grateful he told my parents, or pissed he would go behind my back.

Thing is, I shouldn't be mad, but I want to be so badly.

"So, sweetie..." My mother smiles at me, and it doesn't reach her eyes. She is pissed off at me, and I can only think of one thing that has her like this. They told her about the dean and his blackmailing ways.

"Yes, Mom." I smile back at her.

"So, the guys were telling me how much they love having you here and all the wonderful cooking you do for them.

"It was a surprise for me and your father because we thought you were staying in the dorms...with other girls."

"Mom, I wanted to tell you and Dad, but you guys were always busy, and I was busy with school work—sorry?" I bit my bottom lip.

"No need to be sorry, sweetie. Your mother has to come to the realization that you are an adult now."

My dad looks over at my mother, squeezing her hand gently. It was his subtle way of telling her not to scold me in front of others.

I noticed that move during holiday dinners growing up. My mother looks to my father, agreeing.

"No Dad, Mom is right. I should have told you both as soon as I found out where I was going to be staying for the semester." I look at my parents and then around the table.

As I suspected the guys were staring at us. “So, Chase, why did you call my parents here?” I couldn’t hold it in anymore. I’d rather get this over with now, than be alone with my parents getting my ass handed to me.

“Umm...” he clears his throat. He must have thought I wasn’t going to call him out on it. News flash. I hate getting in trouble with my parents, and anything goes at this point.

“Umm?” I ask.

“I told them what happened, and they decided to make a trip to the school.”

“Did you tell them while you were at the construction site or while you were still in the house?”

I raise my eyebrow at him. I’ve had some time to think in between making everyone’s plate of food that the only way my parents could have gotten here so quickly was if they were told while he was in the house.

“Umm...” he says again.

“You know, Chase, I never took you for the speechless type. But you don’t have to answer, because I already know the answer. You see, you didn’t even give me a chance to tell my parents what is going on.

“Quite frankly, I don’t think it was your place to tell them anything, seeing as we aren’t—wait how did you get their number?”

“That would have been me,” Austin says, putting another fork full of pasta in his mouth.

“Wow...does anybody else have something to confess?” I balled my hands into fists. I can feel my nails digging into my palms. The irony is how I feel betrayed by them.

“Charlotte!” my mother snaps. “You shouldn’t be mad at what these young men did. If anything, you should be thanking them.

“Your father and I are going to put a stop to that asshole of a dean and his daughter. No one will come between you and your dreams.”

“Mom...”

“Don’t ‘Mom’ me. In the morning we are heading down to his office, and I will let him know about himself. What kind of dean is he...?”

At this point, I am tuning her out along with everyone else. I don’t know what is worse, my mother preaching about the dean and his daughter or the guys egging her on. It’s like watching a bad 80s flick.

I stand up and excuse myself from the table. I don't think anyone really cares because they are so much into my mother's speech. I think I heard her quote something from *The Breakfast Club*, too.

"Charles." I stop mid-step and look down the staircase.

"What do you want, Chase? Came to give me more headaches?" I turn back around walking upstairs, not caring to talk to him anymore.

"Charlotte." He grabs my wrist. "Why are you acting this way? Why are you being so spicy?"

"Spicy?"

"Yeah, you know—this little attitude you got going on."

"What?" I let out a dry chuckle. Ladies and gents, Chase has lost his damn marbles.

"You are the problem...I believe you will always be the problem. Chase, you just don't get it, do you?" I look down at his hand on my wrist and then his face. He genuinely looks lost, but I just can't...

"You crossed the line, Chase. Telling my parents—it wasn't your place. I was going to do it..."

"When? After you got expelled or before you head to California by betraying us? We both know you weren't going to tell your parents, and you know it.

"Charlotte, I saw the way you were at the table. You pretend to be this perfect, innocent child to your parents...why?"

He lets go of my wrist and takes another step, making it impossible for me to not be surrounded by his scent.

"You don't get it, Chase. I am the only child, their golden child—I am supposed to be perfect in every aspect of the word. My parents have never accepted anything but the best from me.

"Growing up, if there was a problem, and I could fix it before my parents could find out, I would do it. It's always been that way. I don't want to be a disappointment to them or anyone I love.

"That's why I never told anyone about the dean. I was going to fix it. I had to fix it."

"Charlotte." He wipes the lone tear that escaped my eyes.

"It's okay to be imperfect. The most beautiful people are imperfect. Those are the people you love hard and fight your hardest to never lose and I'll be damned if I lose you. Like I said before, Charlotte, I love you.

"I love that you chew on pen tops and the bottoms of pens—even though it's gross, it makes you, you. I love that you can't put on makeup properly—"

"I don't?" I mean, I know I don't, but I didn't think he noticed. I think I put on too much mascara, but I like that whole dramatic look.

"Yeah, the guys, and I didn't know how to tell you, we think you put too much of that glowy stuff on your face... kinda looks like you are sweating glitter." He caresses my cheek.

"I love you and all your flaws, and I want to protect you—it's okay sometimes to let people who love you help you." He leans in, kissing my lips softly, and I kiss him back.

"Highlighter," I say when we end the kiss.

"Huh?"

"The glowy thing... it's highlighter." I smile, walking upstairs.

"Where are you going? Are you not coming back to the table?"

"I have to do something really quick. I'll be down shortly."

He raises one of his eyebrows at me.

"It's a girl thing... don't worry, I am not going to abandon ship anymore. Promise I'll be back before my mother can finish her so empowering speech."

"You do know that some of her speech is from *The Breakfast Club* and *The Karate Kid*, right?"

"I do."

I reach my room, locking the door behind me. Sitting at my desk, I power on my laptop.

To: admissions@RCA.gov

From: Charlotte.Withers@Walsh.edu

Good Evening,...