

Chapter 4

CHARLOTTE

Chase goes from embarrassed to annoyed in two seconds flat. His brows furrow, and he stands up way too fast, nearly knocking over the chair.

“What the hell, Charlotte? You trying to give me a heart attack? Don’t sneak up on people like that.”

He gets right in my face. He towers over me, jaw clenched, and for a second, I think he might actually yell. He looks furious. And somehow, that just makes me laugh.

My laughing makes him madder.

I blink at him, then smirk. “Relax. I just caught you having a romantic moment with a plate of mashed potatoes. It was kind of sweet.”

“I was starving,” he snaps, grabbing his cup. “I didn’t even know it was yours. I just grabbed whatever was sitting out.”

“Sure you did,” I say, folding my arms. “Just don’t go falling in love with me now that you know I can cook.”

He snorts. “As if. I’d never fall for someone who makes... whatever that was. It tasted like sadness.”

“When you said ‘yum’ out loud, you didn’t sound sad.”

“Oh, I get it now,” he snaps. “You think you’re better than everyone else, huh? Just because you can cook? Big deal, Charlotte. So can the people at McDonald’s.”

Then, in dramatic Chase fashion, he scoops up the rest of the food, walks over to the trash can, and slams it inside.

“Thanks for the heartburn,” he mutters before stalking back inside.

What the fuck is his deal? A guy acting weird about potatoes. Totally normal college stuff.

I go to the bathroom behind a bush and head back inside.

The party has somehow gotten louder. The lights are dimmer, the music heavier. I spot Chase near the drink table, and—wow—he's stewing.

He's throwing down shots and every time he does, shoots me a glare.

Cool. Love that for me.

Drunk Natalia stumbles over to him, all legs and glitter.

"Chasey, come dance with me!" she sings, grabbing his arm before he can say another word.

He lets her pull him away, glancing back at me once with a look I can't quite read.

Raven appears at my side. She's drunk too.

"So. Many. Hot. Guys." she says, her eyes darting around the room. "I can't believe you live here."

"Me neither."

"Darren seems nice..." I look at her and she is full on staring at him as he arm wrestles with one of the other guys.

Why are they arm wrestling? These guys are so weird.

Raven speaks as if she's in a trance. "I was wondering if you wouldn't mind putting in a good word for me."

"I barely know him, or any of them," I tell her.

"But you will get to know them, right?" She says as she grabs my arm desperately. "I mean, no rush, you just moved into the house, but also, like kind of a rush, cause mama wants to get some."

I laugh. She has a way with words...

"I'll see what I can do, but I make no promises. These guys aren't lik—"

"I can handle it, Char. I am a big girl."

We hear a loud cheer. Darren won at arm wrestling. The other dude knocks a lamp off the table and it breaks. They all laugh.

"Just don't get your hopes up, Rave. These are the guys of Croakington - the only thing they break more than furniture is hearts."

“Not our hearts! We’re too amazing. I’ll be with Darren and you’ll be with Chase. You and Chase are SO going to end up together. I can totally tell.”

“If I live here too long, the only place I’ll end up is jail, for burning this house down.”

“It’s totally enemies-to-lovers. Girl, the fairy tale is fairy-taling.”

“That look like something Prince Charming would do?” I ask as I point at the dance floor. Natalia and Chase are full-on grinding like it needs a warning label.

Raven’s eyebrows raise. “Ew. I hope he’s wearing protection. Like... damn.”

I tell myself to look away, but I don’t. I watch them.

Chase’s hands are on Natalia’s hips, moving in sync with hers like he’s done it a million times. But his eyes? They’re locked on me.

We stare at each other through the crowd and noise and flashing lights. He’s grinding on her, but his gaze doesn’t waver. Like I’m the one in his arms, not her.

Then he grabs her face, all possessive and dramatic, and kisses her. It’s messy and showy and goes on way too long. He grabs her ass and gives it a squeeze. It’s awkward, mechanical, and so not sexy. Like he’s just going through the motions for show.

Is he seriously trying to make me jealous?

Because that’s pathetic.

It’s also pathetic that it’s kind of working.

Of course he wants someone like Natalia. Perfect, bubbly, model-gorgeous Natalia with her shiny hair and flirty giggle. The kind of girl who gets anything she wants with the flip of a ponytail.

I’m not like that. I never have been. And no matter how good my mashed potatoes are, I’ll never be Chase Tucker’s type.

Raven leaves me to go play beer pong with Darren. The last I see, she is somehow beating two of the guys at beer pong and still trash talking like a pro.

I slip away upstairs without saying goodbye.

I shut the door to my room and press my back against it, exhaling slowly.

I climb into bed fully dressed and bury my face in the pillow.

Why does he get under my skin like this?

I don't know.

What a first night.

I must fall asleep, because the next thing I know a noise in the hallway wakes me up. Footsteps.

I groan and pull the blanket over my head. Please don't let it be Chase and Natalia. I don't want to listen to them hooking up. I don't think I can take her moaning his name in that annoying voice.

Then I hear it—my door opening.

My heart stutters. I sit up fast. Chase stumbles in, pretty drunk.

"Seriously? What happened to the always-knock rule?"

"If I knocked, you wouldn't have let me in," he says, closing the door behind him.

"You're not wrong," I say, not moving from the bed. "But you are drunk."

"Little bit," he shrugs, then leans against the wall like it's the only thing keeping him standing. "Can we talk?"

"About what?"

He runs a hand through his hair, messy now. "Like, what is it about me that makes you hate me so much?"

I frown. "I don't hate you."

"You sure?" he says, stepping closer.

I've never seen Chase not be one hundred percent confident. What's happening?

"I don't hate you, I just don't worship you like everyone else does."

He laughs—bitter and sharp. "I don't want anyone to worship me."

"Please. You soak it up," I say, rolling my eyes. "That's how Natalia got you, isn't it?"

To prove my point, I put on a little show, going full-on fake-Natalia. I flip my hair and bat my lashes.

“Oh, Chasey,” I say, voice sweet and fake. “You’re just so strong and hot and perfect, Chasey. Can I touch your abs, Chasey?”

I trail a hand down his chest, and then pull him by the shirt onto the bed so he’s sitting next to me.

“I mean, Chasey,” I purr, twirling a lock of my hair around my finger, “you must be the handsomest quarterback in the whole universe.” I lean in closer, dropping my voice to a whisper. “Do you mind if I use you as my chair, Chasey?”

To my own horror, I don’t stop. I climb into his lap, straddling him before I can second guess it.

Wow, maybe I should be an actor, because I am really getting into this.

I brace for him to throw me on the ground and put a stop to this ridiculousness.

But he doesn’t.

Instead, his hands grab my hips and he pulls me closer.

“Fuck,” he breathes, voice low. “This is all I’ve wanted all night.”

My heart does a full flip.

But is he messing with me?

“Are you pretending again?” I ask, nervously, dropping the act.

He shakes his head, eyes on mine. They’re full of fire. “I’m sorry about that. That was dumb. Honestly, I wanted to kiss you then. I just... didn’t.”

My hands drift up and take hold of his neck. His grip tightens at my hip, fingers curling into the fabric of my dress.

I don’t think either of us are breathing.

“It’s not too late,” I whisper.

He nods, licks his lips, leans in, and kisses me for real.

Next Chapter

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