

Charlotte and the Seven Frat Brothers | Chapter 44

Chapter 44

CHARLOTTE

You know the feeling you get when you know you did something wrong, but don't want to admit it? That's me right now. Well, that has been me all morning.

Miguel made it very clear that if he finds out I let Jasper in the apartment, he would have some colorful words for me.

Technically I didn't let him in. He waited in the hallway. I don't know if I should have come all the way upstate with Jasper.

I just really wanted to know more about the Tucker family—well, more than what Google has told me. So, when Jasper invited me to lunch with his parents, I said why not.

I thought about telling the guys but I knew they wouldn't understand.

The drive upstate was awkward, to say the least. Jasper barely said anything to me. We listened to the radio the majority of the drive.

Two hours without actually having a conversation wasn't fun. I think I took two naps. We reached his parents' home, and I didn't think I could get out of the car fast enough.

I just wanted to be near other people who would actually speak.

There are two more cars out front, probably belonging to his parents. So, he didn't lie when he said they will both be here.

Before entering the house, he tells me that his father can be a bit of an asshole and not to take what he said seriously.

Well, that is easier said than done. Jasper opens the front door allowing me to go in first and I see Chase walk by.

I freeze.

What.

The.

Hell.

"Cupcake?"

“Hi.” I wave awkwardly. Oh, this is bad...really bad.

“Who’s Cupcake?” Jasper walks in, standing off to the side. Looking at Chase and me. I don’t have a lie on the tip of my tongue, so I am just going to stay quiet on this one.

Chase opens his mouth to speak, but a beautiful baby girl about four years old comes running into the foyer screaming “Dada!”—at Jasper.

“Hey princess,” he picks her up, placing a kiss on her forehead. “Have you been good to Nana?”

She nods her head yes. Austin comes crawling into the foyer. I’m assuming he was playing with the baby. He stops mid crawl when he sees Jasper, but his eyes get wide when he sees me.

I toss my head back, coming to the realization that all the guys are here. Counting to ten slowly, I look back at Chase, and he is pissed off. Austin stands up and greets me.

“Hi to you too, Austin. Question: are you all here?” I just need reassurance about what I already know.

“Yeah,” he drags out. “I’m going to go back to the living room.” He steps back slowly.

“I’ll come with you,” I rush out, walking quickly towards him. I didn’t want to be left alone with Jasper or Chase, and I definitely didn’t want to explain the whole Cupcake thing.

“Not so fast,” Chase grabs my elbow and steers me in the other direction. “We need to talk.”

Jasper looks torn between wanting to follow us and staying with his child. I can’t believe he has a child. Holy hell.

“What do you think you’re doing?” he whisper-yells at me once we make it into the kitchen. “Why are you with my brother?”

“First of all, let me go,” I snatch my arm away from him. “Secondly, it shouldn’t matter what I do or who I do it with. You lied to me and—”

“Charles, cut the shit. What I did doesn’t compare or even come close to this shit. The guys are right about one thing...you keep putting your nose in shit it has no business being in.”

“Excuse me!?”

"You heard me, Charlotte, you keep doing this. Why did you come here?" He steps closer to me. "Do you like to see me stressed out and worried about you? I told you my family isn't the Brady Bunch. Why are you doing this?"

"Because, Chase, you won't give me answers. How are we supposed to get married one day when I don't know anything about you or your family?"

"Huh? Tell me how. You can't because you want to keep this mysterious thing going about yourself." I close the space between us.

"That's a stupid reason." He lifts my chin and kisses me deeply. "God, I miss you," he whispers on my lips.

You remember me saying earlier, you know the feeling you get when you know you did something wrong, but don't want to admit it? That's me right now.

Hell, that's me and Chase right now. Making out in his parents' kitchen with everyone at home is the worst thing right now. I want to break the kiss, but I miss him so much.

"Chase," I moan as he begins to kiss my neck.

"Ace! Whatcha doing?"

The sound of the little girl's voice shook me. I know who is behind us, and I'm not sure how much she has heard. I'm starting to believe that saying, "What happens in the dark will come to light."

Chase takes a step back and I just stay still, I can't turn around. This is not how I wanted Jasper to find out. But really what did I expect? I am having a full-on make-out session in their parents' kitchen.

"Hey there, Princess." Chase disappears behind me, and I'm sticking to my word of not turning around. I take interest in the kitchen now. Beautifully decorated and everything.

"Oh, Jasper, sweetie, I didn't think you were going to make it. Ah, I see you invited a friend." Oh crap, that must be his mother.

Please, floor just open up and swallow me now.

"Actually, this is Chase's friend, or should I say, fiancé? Charlotte, why don't you turn around and say hello to our mother?" Jasper's voice is cold, and I don't have to see his face to know he is pissed off.

"Oh Chase, fiancé, hmm?" Their mother doesn't sound mad but not happy either.

Slowly I turn around and smile. My smile probably looks like Wednesday Addams' creepy smile. Their mother looks me up and down at least twice before taking a step back. I slowly stop smiling and wave hi.

"Lily?" she quickly wipes her eyes. "Did I die and this is all a dream? Oh hell, I must be dead." She starts to panic and starts to question me too. "Does that mean I'm dead or am I dreaming all of this?"

"No, mother, you are very much alive. This is Charlotte Withers, my fri—my fiancé. She resembles Lily because..." He pauses. "Lily's her cousin."

Chase just dropped a bomb, and I think I am not ready. This can't be happening. I would know if I had a cousin named Lily that I look like. My parents have never mentioned a Lily at all.

I think back to holidays, and nope, no Lily. The room feels like it's closing in on me as it's spinning and everything fades to black.

"Hey, Charles..."

"Dude, I think she is dead..."

"She hit her head pretty hard on the way down..."

"Sweetie, I don't understand why you would..."

"I think we should call 911..."

"Lily's cousin..."

I slowly open my eyes and come face to face with everyone—they're all hovering over me. Austin helps me sit up straight and I touch the side of my head feeling a small knot.

Oh gosh. How bad was my fall?

"Charles, how many fingers am I holding up?"

Everett waves his hand in front of my face, and Vincent quickly smacks his hand down, telling him to grow up and be serious. Serious—this whole situation is one big serious mess.

I'm supposedly related to Jasper's dead girlfriend, and Chase knew this for the longest time. Now all his demanding and controlling behavior is starting to make some sense. He thinks I would fall for Jasper if he made a pass at me.

“Guys, give the poor girl some space.” Chase and Jasper’s mother gestures for the guys to move back.

I catch a glimpse of Jasper standing in the far corner of the living room. His eyes and body language are reflecting every emotion I am feeling as well: hurt, anger, and confusion. Chase has a lot of explaining to do.

“How are you feeling, dear?”

“I’m fine, thank you.” I clear my throat.

“Here you go.” Evan Tucker hands me a glass of water. Sweet nibblets, how long was I out for? I hesitate to take the glass from him and he notices.

“Don’t be afraid...it’s only water.” He smiles, but it doesn’t reach his eyes. He is just putting on a show for his wife—I bet.

Chase takes the glass from him, placing it on the coffee table. I cast my eyes down at my hands, scared to look Mr. Tucker in the face again.

“Can we just address the elephant in the room so we can eat? I am starving.” Tristan speaks up, breaking the awkward and very intense silence.

“Yeah, brother, please explain to everyone—especially father—what you know. I’m pretty sure you’ve been hiding things from us all for years,” Jasper snaps.

“Chase,” Mr. Tucker looks at him with a death stare. How is he not running for the hills? If my dad ever gave me that look, I would cry.

But I think that’s what Chase needs. A little deadly intimidation so he can spit it out already.

“Are we forgetting that Charles hit her head pret—”

“Austin, I am fine. Let Chase talk... I need to know what’s going on.” I whisper the last part underneath my breath, looking at the little girl who has occupied Mrs. Tucker’s lap.

“Are you sure? If you’re in any pain, we can just go to the hosp—”

“Chase, just tell us about Lily.” I rub the knot on my head. I won’t let him delay telling us the truth any longer.

“Alright, like I told the guys in the car, Lily never talked about her family, said they were dead.

"I found out that Charles and Lily were cousins because one night Lily was drunk, trying to hit on me as usual, back when I was in high school, and I mentioned she looked a lot like a girl I knew.

"I said 'Charlotte Withers' and she froze. From there I knew she was hiding something. Finally, she opened up and told me and she had me promise not to say anything or she would tell Jasper I made a pass at her.

"I knew he would believe her because of previous incidents with other females."

"That's impossible. I would know of a cousin that—we looked alike." I stand up.

"Where are you going?" Everett stands up following me.

"I'm calling my mother. I have a cousin who passed away, and no one in my family that I know of went to her funeral.

"It's wrong, and now I have a baby cousin I never knew existed, and she looks absolutely beautiful. My family needs to open their hearts to her."

Mrs. Tucker gets up, excusing herself to put Autumn down for a nap.

"Before you call your mother... calm down." Mr. Tucker turns himself around. "You won't get answers that way."

He exhales deeply, turning his attention to Chase. "Son, why are you now telling me and your brother about this?"

Mr. Tucker is right, but this—Lily was family. I ease out of the room once everyone's attention goes back to Chase.

I scroll through my contacts and click my mother's name. The phone rings once and her cheerful greeting fills my ear.

"Hey, Mom."

"Is everything alright? You sound a bit upset."

"Who's Lily Nelson?"

"I'm not sure who you are talking about. What is going on? Is someone harassing you?"

"Mom, who is Lily? Is she my cousin? You know something—your voice got really high."

"Where are you?"

“Mom, please just stop answering my questions with questions. Just tell me!” I am losing my patience with everyone keeping secrets.

She knows who Lily is. My mother is an open book when I ask her questions. She never kept secrets from me—so I thought.

“Lily was your sister.”

“Sister?”

“Can you book a flight and come home? Your father and I should talk to you in person.”

“Talk to me now!”

“Charlotte Withers, you watch your tone with me. Let’s not forget who the parent is.”

“Mom, I had a sister that I knew nothing about and she passed away. Did you go to her funeral, Dad?”

“Yes, he did. I didn’t—I couldn’t.”

“Why not? She was your daughter. You gave her life. How could you not go? Was your chef life more important? Was she some sort of embarrassment to you and Dad?”

I can hear glass shatter on my mother’s end.

“She wasn’t my child, Charlotte! Since you moved into that frat house you’ve changed. You need to snap out of the heroic Nancy Drew phase.

“Not once have I lied to you about something you wanted to know. I’ve always been open to you. This situation is your father’s story. He had an affair with a waitress and she got pregnant.”

I can hear sniffing.

“Mom, I’m sorry I didn’t mean to op—”

“Charlotte, I have to go.”

“Mom I am—”

The call ends, and I feel so horrible.

“Are you okay?” I turn around, and Darren is standing in the doorway. I shake my head as my vision starts to blur. I open old wounds for my mother and who knows what might happen now.

My father had an affair—he had an affair. Why would he do that?

“Lily was my sister.” I wipe away my tears.

“I know. Your mother was pretty loud on the phone and very hurt as well.” Darren crosses his arms over his chest. “You should have listened to Mr. Tucker, and waited to call, but what’s done is done now.”

“I just wanted answers.”

He exhales loudly and walks to me, pulling me into his chest.

“Charles you can’t be wrong and strong, it just doesn’t work that way. Now look, your mom is hurting all over again twice. You got to think before you speak and react to things, especially so serious like this.”

“What the hell is going on?”

Darren doesn’t let me go right away. Jasper looks upset—for what now, I don’t know.

“Dude, why are you so angry all the time? And stop with the overprotective jealous act with Charles. She isn’t your woman, and she isn’t Lily.”

Jasper moves quickly to Darren, and I step in between them.

“Don’t you ever say her name!” Jasper’s nose flares.

“Guys—Jasper. He didn’t mean anything by it.”

He looks down at me and his face softens. “You’ve been crying, why?” He lifts his hand, and Darren pulls me back.

“Don’t touch her.”

“Darren—”

“Jasper, how about you fuck off? Charles is fine,” says Darren.

“Darren!” I look at him as if he has lost his mind. What the hell is his problem?

“What is going on out here?” Miguel walks out of the house with the rest of the guys trailing behind him. Seriously, do they always have to travel in a pack?

“Jasper was just leaving.” Darren raises an eyebrow at him. Jasper mumbles something underneath his breath and walks back into the house.

Chase looks me over and turns his attention to Darren. What the hell was that for? I know he can't be upset with me. He is the one who lied and kept such a massive secret from everyone.

"Can one of you tell us what the hell just happened?" Everett says, stuffing his mouth with bacon. Leave it to him to find something to eat.

"Lily wasn't Charlotte's cousin. According to her mother, Lily was Charles's half-sister." Darren wastes no time spilling the beans.

"This has turned into a real-life *All My Children* episode." Miguel shakes his head, walking back into the house. "I'm going to eat before you fools drop any more bombs." He says over his shoulder.

"Yeah, food first." I agree, rushing quickly behind Miguel. With this massive headache I have, I need to eat, and then be prepared for whatever else is going to happen today and the days to come.

Next Chapter

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