

Charlotte and the Seven Frat Brothers | Chapter 45

Chapter 45

CHASE

“Hey Jasper, can we talk for a minute?” Everyone’s eyes land on mine at the table. “In private?”

“Uh, sure.” He clears his throat.

Standing up, we head to the back of the house, into our father’s office. I close the door behind us. He and I need to clear the air before we head back to the city.

There are a lot of things going on that neither one of us knows about, and being at each other’s throats isn’t helping us see the bigger picture.

We used to be two peas in a pod, and I kind of miss that about us. I need to save what’s left of our relationship not only for the sake of Charlotte but for us as well.

“I just want to say sorry about keeping such a huge secret from you. I should have told you about Charles when Lily first told me.”

I take a seat on the edge of dad’s desk. “I just didn’t want Lily to ruin whatever we had left.”

He crosses his arms over his chest, leaning against the bookcase. “I should be the one apologizing to you.”

“No, I was in the wrong. I kept something not only away from you but Autumn too. She has other family members out there besides us, and I kept that away from her.

“You shut me completely out once Lily passed away, and I thought why should I tell—”

“Chase, it was my fault too. I blamed you for all the times a relationship didn’t work—thinking you flirted with them or slept with one or five of them.

“I should have just come and talked to you, but I just didn’t want to look stupid.”

“No look at us—we look foolish. You were my best friend growing up and then girls happened...you changed and I didn’t know what else to do.

“So yeah, I acted out on some of the girls, mainly the ones that you didn’t care for. I was wrong. I just wanted my big brother back.” I run my hand down my face.

“But Lily, I wouldn’t dare do anything. She on the other hand was...” I don’t know if I should even finish that sentence. I don’t want to bash the dead.

“I know. I caught her a few times. Not only trying to make a pass at you, but some of my buddies too. I never told anyone about this, but that night of the car accident—I was breaking up with her.

“I said some hurtful things to her and I wish I could take it back. She felt like the love of my life and if I could have a second chance to change everything leading up to that night, I would.” He wipes a lone tear from his cheek.

Man, I hate seeing my brother this way. I know how much she meant to him. She made him smile and open up.

He was happier with her than anyone I’ve seen him with before. She just had single tendencies while being in a relationship.

“What happened that night wasn’t your fault,” I try to reassure him.

“If I could trade places with her, I would. Autumn will never get to see just how amazing her mother was.

“Yeah, she was a bit much, but with counseling, I think we could have overcome it. Some days I could still feel her and when...”

“Charles showed up...you felt a pull?” I finished for him.

He nods his head. “It was like God was giving me a second chance. Then you arrived, and I could see how much she was into you, and it pissed me off.

“I wanted her all to myself; I even thought she would make a great mother figure for Autumn—sounds crazy when I say it out loud.”

“I should tell you this. Lily is actually Charlotte’s older sister.”

“What?” he stands straight up. “I thought you said she was her cousin.”

“That’s what Lily told me. However, right before we all came back inside, Charles’s mother told her over the phone that Lily is actually her sister. Their dad had an affair.”

I was going to let Charles tell him, but knew she wouldn’t and would somehow get herself thrown into a bigger mess.

“Why would she lie—Lily, I mean?”

"I don't know, but we will get to the bottom of this together. I just need you to back off Charles—I mean it in the nicest way possible.

"She is my fiancée and I know the striking resemblance with Lily is hard to overlook, but she isn't her. She is my happiness and I can't lose her...I won't lose her."

I keep my voice neutral. I know it is killing him inside to see his ex-lover doppelganger and he can't have her. Charles, who I wanted for a long time and being with her still feels like a dream.

I found a love for myself, and I will fight to keep it.

"I'm sorry about that. It's just hard seeing pieces of Lily in her—I'll back off." He blinks several times, fighting his tears. I walk towards him pulling him into a hug.

"I am so sorry, Chase—I miss her so much." He breaks down and cries. I don't know if he ever had time to fully mourn the death of Lily, but by the painful crying he is doing, I will take that as a no.

"Maybe you should go to therapy about this. It will help out a lot. You haven't grieved for her, so it's harder for you to move on. You won't be able to move on fully without letting go.

"We can go together if you want. I'll be your support, brother."

A soft knock on the door followed by inaudible baby talk caught our attention. Jasper wipes his face but I don't move. I want him to know I am here for him; I've always been here for him.

"You okay?" I know he isn't, but for some strange reason, I still ask.

"Yeah."

There is another knock. I open the door and in comes Charles holding Autumn. I have to take a minute and get my thoughts together.

She really does look like Lily and with her holding Autumn, I can see what Jasper was talking about. This will be hard for him.

"Is everything okay? Autumn just woke up and Mrs. Tucker said I could hold her. I hope that's okay?" She looks at Jasper and me.

"Yeah, she should get to know her aunt." Jasper smiles and his eyes water again.

"Charles, can you give us a minute?" I say.

"No, it's okay," Jasper responds. "I need to get used to seeing this. Lily would be so happy..." he chokes.

"Lily must have been an amazing woman," Charles speaks up. "You know, if you want help watching Autumn, I wouldn't mind."

This is *why* I had to talk to Jasper first. Charles is so kind-hearted, and I knew she would want to be around Autumn once she knew she was family.

Which meant she would be around Jasper a little bit more too. I trust Charles and my brother—at times.

This situation was different. Emotions and feelings will be at an all-time high if they were alone playing happy family.

"She was." Jasper looks to me and then to Charles. "I would like that, but only if you and Chase can do it together. I honestly can't be around you with Autumn alone. Seeing you is like looking at Lily and..."

"I understand, but if you are lonely, I do know someone who likes you for you. I can—"

"No thank you, Charlotte. I can find my own women."

"Charles, let's not interfere with Jasper's love life. We still need to figure out ours," I tell her.

"Yeah, like how you slept with Juju." Her voice is stern, and I know bringing up us was not a good idea.

"No worries though, the guys already filled me in with more details. I'm heading back to Georgia tonight. There's a lot of things that I need to do and people to see. Starting with my parents."

"You cheated?" Jasper looks at me crazy.

"No," I answer quickly.

"He lied about it," Charles looks at me. "But I should go. Autumn hasn't eaten yet, and I just stopped by to check on you guys." She turns on her heels and exits the office.

Jasper lets out a low whistle. "She definitely is a firecracker. I think you should book that ticket of yours too."

"Already on it." I have my phone out looking for the next available flight for tonight.

Charles for sure is going to make her presence known on campus when she gets back to Georgia, and I need to let Everett know what's going on as well.

No more keeping things in the dark from anyone. Once we get this situation cleared and figured out when we can move on to what the hell is going on with my father's company.

Oh yeah, and Xavier.