

Charlotte and the Seven Frat Brothers |

Chapter 48

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CHARLOTTE

“Do you have a place to stay tonight?” I look over at Austin, and he looks at me with a grin on his face. “You need a place to crash?”

He nods his head.

“We have a few guest rooms. I can get you settled in once I speak to my parents.”

“Shouldn’t you settle me in first?” Austin closes the car door behind us and follows me to the front door. “I don’t want to intrude on such a conversation.

I laugh, unlocking the door. “I think it’s a little too late for the whole intruding statement. You came out here to intrude. So first—”

“Charlotte, we are in the kitchen,” my mother calls out for me. Austin stops walking and stands in the foyer. I raise an eyebrow at him and pull him with me towards the kitchen.

This is what the guys wanted, and I am not going to let Austin off so easily.

“Mother, Father,” I walk into the kitchen. “This is my friend, Austin. Is it alright if he spends the night in one of the guest rooms?”

They acknowledge his presence, but I can sense that my mother isn’t too happy that I have company over.

“Sweetie, how about you show Austin where he will be sleeping tonight and come back down so we can talk.” My mother plasters a fake smile on her face.

“Actually, Austin will be sitting in on this conversation. He knows everything that is happening. He kind of was there when everything came out in the open.

“I think him being here will benefit me and the other parties involved.” I take a seat at the kitchen island.

“Other parties.” My dad looks at Austin and then back to me. “This is our family we are talking about. Not some silly college club.”

“Right.” I chuckle. “You see Austin is best friends with Chase Tucker, who happens to be the uncle of Lily’s daughter, Autumn, my niece.” I can feel my blood boiling.

“Well, I wouldn’t have said those exact words,” Austin says from the entryway. “Mr. and Mrs. Withers, nice to meet you both.”

“Lily... she has a daughter?” my dad asks, and my mother clears her throat. I can see her eyes darkening and a scowl making its way onto her face. What the hell is going on?

“Charley?” my dad calls my name, and I nod my head yes.

“I only met her today, but she resembles you, Dad.” I smile at him.

“How old is she?”

Austin clears his throat. “Sorry to interrupt, but before we do go further, I have to—the Tucker family wishes that you not turn this into a legal custody battle of Autumn.”

He walks further into the kitchen, pulling a paper out from inside his jacket pocket. I look at him warily and mouth *what are you doing?*

“Are you saying they don’t want me to see my only grandchild?” My father looks just as shocked as me.

“Of course not. They want Autumn to get to know her mother’s side of the family. It’s just that she is three, and all she has ever known are the Tuckers. A nasty custody battle wouldn’t be wise for the sake of Autumn.”

He hands the papers to my father. “The Tuckers had this agreement drawn up after Lily’s death. I will leave it with you to go over, and I think I should go find that guest room.”

What the hell? “Mom, Dad, I will be right back, let me settle Austin in.”

Once we reached inside the guest room upstairs, I slap Austin on the arm as hard as I can.

“What the hell was that for?” He rubs the spot I just hit.

“What were you thinking? What are those papers?”

“Charles, Autumn is the Tuckers’ life, and having her ripped away is the last thing they want.”

"You think my parents would take her from Jasper? That's just silly and stupid for you all to think. My parents would never do such a thing," I defend them.

"Austin, you can't just come into my parents' home and accuse them of such things, and the papers...why?"

Austin takes a seat at the foot of the bed. "Jasper is a workaholic, that's why Autumn stays upstate with Mrs. Tucker. Your parents can fight that and say he is an unfit father, which by all means he isn't.

"A dickhead? Yes. Just not a bad father."

He sighs, gesturing for me to sit next to him. "Those papers are just an agreement when it comes to Autumn. I skimmed over it during my flight. The Tuckers are not stopping your dad from seeing her.

"They want him to see her during holidays and when she gets older, she can spend summers and holidays with you and your family."

"Why can't they have just told him that in person?"

"Lily didn't want it to be known who her family was for a reason, and something about your mot—"

The sound of glass breaking made us both jump. We race downstairs, and I see my mother breaking dishes left and right. My father is trying to calm her down, but to no avail.

I never really liked when my parents argued because this always seems to be the outcome. My mother is a firecracker when angry and nothing can get her to calm down. I hate seeing this side of her.

"What is going on?" I ask, not getting too close to them.

"I forbid you from seeing Autumn." She points a plate in my direction.

"Wait—what? Why?"

"Because I said so."

"Honey," my dad calls out to her and she looks at him. "I am going to sign the agreement. She is my granddaughter."

My mother throws the plate at my father and he steps out of the way and it breaks against the wall.

“Mom!” I scream. “Please stop this.” I take a step further, but Austin is pulling me back, shielding me. “Mom, please.”

“Honey...”

“Don’t honey me.”

“Well then, dammit, Hailee, you’re acting ridiculous. I apologized numerous times for the affair. I sent Janet on her way with my daughter. I had to watch my firstborn grow up from pictures.

“She died not knowing that I loved her. I stayed in this marriage with you for so long because of Charley, but I can’t do this anymore, Hailee.”

My father runs his fingers through his hair.

“So, you are going to let some little fucking brat tear us apart,” she snaps. Within a nanosecond, my dad grabs my mother.

I don’t know what in the world is going on because seeing them interact with each other this way is new.

My father has never laid his hand on my mother in any way but lovingly. I push Austin to get my dad, fearing that he just might hit Mom.

“Don’t you dare speak ill about my granddaughter. You may have manipulated me when it came to Lily, but I will be damned if you do that with Autumn and Charley.”

He lets go of her face and allows Austin to escort him out of the kitchen.

“Mom,” I walk to her. “Are you okay?”

“If you are planning on seeing that baby again, then you can just walk right out that door too, and leave me alone.”

“Mom, you can’t be serious? That’s my niece and you...you’re my mother. I can’t possibly choose.” She reaches for the agreement, and I grab it before her.

“Mom, you have to relax and just breathe.” Her eyes are watering and I want to comfort her, but I don’t know what she will do next.

“Just go, Charlotte. I want you and your dad out of my house tonight.”

“Mom.”

"No, we have nothing to talk about...just leave." Her voice gets louder. Taking the agreement, I scurry out of the kitchen. Austin is waiting in the foyer alone.

"Where is my dad?"

"He went to pack a suitcase and get all his important paperwork." he pauses. "I am sorry this happened to you. I didn't mean for that agreement to cause this much drama."

"It's not your fault, Austin. Mom and Dad clearly have unresolved issues. A marriage built on lies and manipulation should have never lasted this long."

And this made me think, what I am doing with Chase is wrong. Leaving him in the dark about everything and lying to him. I don't want to end up like my parents. "I need a flight back to New York."

"Huh?"

"I need to go to Chase and make things right again. I don't want to be like my parents. I don't want to lose any of you guys over something that could have been dealt with by just telling the truth."

Wow, did I just have an epiphany?

"First, let's get your father to a hotel and then catch a red-eye back," Austin says.

I pull him into a hug, and for once I am not mad at the guys for looking out for me. I honestly don't know what I would have done if things turned for the worse in this house.

I need to grow up and learn from my mistakes and learn from my parents what not to do.

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