

42 | Brothers

I update on Wednesdays and Fridays, but yesterday I was convinced not to wait that long. You know who you are. So here we go. Chapter 42, up one day early.

Also, if you ask me why there's a video of Pikachu dancing, I don't know. It has nothing to do with the plot, but it's cute.

Chapter 42: Brothers

Luke dropped me o at the front of my house before driving o to basketball practice. I was still a bit tipsy from Chad's pool party.

I wandered up to my front door and started poking the garden gnomes. One of them had a creepy looking face so I turned him away to face the wall.

"Millie. You live here?"

I jumped up, picking up a garden gnome for self-defence. Who is sneaking up on me?

"Jake! You almost gave me a heart attack!"

Jake chuckled and said, "I didn't realize we were neighbors. I just saw you now from my house."

I'd totally forgotten that Jake was a Dawson... and therefore my neighbor.

"You should come over some time," he oered, "Maybe for dinner. Are you free tonight?"

Tonight is... soon.

I didn't want to say much. I was tipsy, and I didn't want to open my mouth and make a fool of myself. It didn't matter how I behaved around Luke. He's seen my crazy.

But Jake. Handsome, nice Jake. I wanted to be on my best behavior around him.

"Tonight?" I repeated.

"Yeah," he said, tilting his head as he picked up on my slurred words, "Maybe a er you take a shower?"

"Yes, yes, a nap," I nodded, trying to maintain composure as I retreated to my front door. I was dreaming of a nap.

"And maybe without the garden gnome?"

"Oh right, yes, right," I nodded and put it down, almost tripping over another one in the process, "Stay there, gnomey."

Jake watched me with an amused expression on his face. He wasn't leaving, partly out of entertainment and partly out of concern. He wanted to make sure I got in ok.

"And Millie?"

"Yes, Jake?"

"Was that my brother you were with?"

Oh.

Yes.

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I slept two hours and woke up hungry. The buzz from Austin's lemonade had waned, and I went down somberly to the kitchen. No one was home yet. I opened the cabinet, searching for boxed mac'n'cheese.

I know Jake had invited me to his place but (1) I'm sure he's forgotten and (2) I'm hungry now.

The doorbell rang.

He hadn't forgotten. Jake had come to pick me up. He must have known I wouldn't appear without his insistence. With great sadness, I le the mac'n'cheese box on the counter and Jake escorted me across the street to his home.

"It's date night tonight," he explained as I stepped into their home.

I froze. Date night? Is this a-

"For my parents," he hastily corrected himself, "Sorry, not for us. My father and step-mother are at a restaurant tonight."

I relaxed at that. This was the first time I've ever stepped foot in the Dawson home. Luke had never invited me and neither had any of his family members. I've known them my whole life and they never once extended an invitation. Now Jake was here for one month and he invited me for dinner.

Kindness. It's underrated.

"Thank you for having me over. I wish I brought a gi or something," I said.

I was annoyed at myself for sleeping instead of buying flowers or chocolates or something.

"I have some mac'n'cheese that I could--"

"That's very sweet of you but no need," he smiled sincerely at me, "I'm happy you're joining us."

I seriously need to forget about this mac'n'cheese.

We walked into their dining room where five plates were set. Baked lasagna was in the middle, with steam rising from the surface. It must have just come out of the oven. Their home was so nicely decorated. The curtains matched the carpet and beautiful family photos decorated the walls.

"My half-sister and brother will be here soon," he said, "Do you like lasagna?"

My mind was stuck on his first sentence. The half-brother part. Luke. I'd forgotten that he would be here.

The doors swung open behind us and I jumped.

False alarm. It wasn't him. Phew.

Two girls walked in. I recognized his sister immediately by her long, flowing, blonde hair. She was holding a large bowl of salad. I also recognized the other girl. She was the same one I had seen the morning Luke picked me up (in Chapter 29). Her hair was also blonde, though it looked dyed, and she was carrying roasted brussel sprouts.

"Who is this, Jake?" his sister asked before approaching me directly, "I've seen you before with my other brother."

I noticed that she didn't refer to Jake as her half-brother, the way he had talked about her.

"I'm Millie. I live next door."

"Really? I used to never see you and, suddenly, you're everywhere," she laughed.

In that moment, I realized that Luke's charm was a family thing. They all had it. A smile that lets them insult you without you even realizing it.

"I'm Charlotte Dawson and this is my best friend, Nicole," she introduced herself and her friend.

Charlotte leaned in and kissed me on either cheek, in the European way. She then set the salad on the table and Nicole set down the brussel sprouts. I made a mental note to sit far away from those.

"Where's Luke?"

Nicole had barely uttered his name when the front door slammed open.

Jake called out, "You're late!"

"Give me five minutes! I'm going to take a shower."

That was Luke. Undoubtedly, unquestionably Luke. I'd never really seen him interact with his siblings before; he tends to keep private about that.

"Let's get started then. My brother can join us when he's ready. Would you like anything to drink, Millie?" Charlotte asked me.

She poured some cranberry juice and we took our seats.

"You should sit here," Nicole pointed at the chair next to Jake, "Luke sits in the one you're in."

I moved out of Luke's seat and into one on the other side of the table. We weren't waiting long before Luke walked into the room, casually dressed. His messy hair was wet from the shower.

"Hey," he nodded at them before his blue eyes landed on me. And they stayed there. "Millie?"

"I invited her," Jake piped up, "Apparently, you haven't gotten around to doing that yet."

"No," Luke answered. His voice was ice, "I haven't."

Oh, brother.

"Well I'm excited to get to know you," Charlotte rubbed her hands together, "You have both my brothers all riled up!"

The tension was palpable. Thankfully, we were saved by the bell. The doorbell rang.

"I'll get it," Jake oered and le the room. He was keen to escape Luke's glare.

"What's wrong with you?" I snapped, now that Jake was out of the room.

"Me? Nothing. I'm in my own home," he acted innocent, "Unlike you." Nicole oered to cut him a slice of lasagna.

Luke handed her the plate and leaned forward, still focused on me, "Since when do you hang out with my brother?"

"Since the last time you saw us hanging out."

"I don't like it."

"I didn't ask you to."

Nicole interrupted us, "Luke, would you like some salad with that?"

Yes.

We heard raised voices on the other side of the dining room door. Jake emerged again, this time with a guy following him.

"Char, he says he's here for you," Jake told his half-sister.

I noticed that both siblings had visibly tensed. Charlotte put her fork down, barely swallowing her salad. She stared up at the preppy boy standing in front of us.

"What are you doing here, babe? You should be back at school."

The preppy boyfriend was angry. "I heard you came back here to see your ex."

I thought back to the day Luke and I saw her in a cocktail dress, sitting on the hood of another boy's car. She wasn't with this boy, sooo... he must have been her ex?

"You shouldn't be here," she said, "I came to see my family and I'll be back in college soon."

"I didn't come all this way to not have this conversation with you. Do you really want to do this here? In front of your family?"

"Do what?"

"You slept with him, didn't you?"

Ookay! did not expect that. I almost choked on a tomato.

"No!" Charlotte exclaimed, "I broke up with him this summer, months before I started dating you."

"You slept with him."

"I didn't."

"You're lying."

I gasped, covering my hands over my mouth, but it was too late. Everyone stared at me.

"Sorry," I apologized, "I was just surprised by the accusation. Why would your girlfriend lie? The truth doesn't cost much but a lie can cost everything."

"Who is this girl?" the boyfriend stared from me, back to the others, "Seriously. Sounds like a Hallmark card."

"OK buddy, you've crossed the line." Now Jake scraped his chair back and stood aggressively in front of Charlotte's boyfriend.

This was escalating quickly. I stared down at my napkin, not sure what to do. Nicole wasn't saying anything and neither were the Dawson brothers. This guy had walked into their home and was accusing Charlotte in front of all of us.

"Charlotte, you're so damn hot but a f'cking liar," her boyfriend exclaimed, "And now you're a cheat."

"I told you I didn't do anything with him!"

Charlotte was the eldest sister, so her brothers hesitated before getting involved in her business. She was the perfect one; the one with her sh't together.

"People saw you at a party! They said you le with him."

"That doesn't mean anything."

"Did you f'ck him?"

Luke blocked the guy from getting any closer to his sister. "She said she didn't. Now you need to back o."

No one else in the room moved. We stared at the two boys as they faced each other. Preppy boy tried sizing Luke up. Luke may be younger, but he was a couple inches taller. And muscular. Luke was a trained athlete and he glared down at his sister's ass, his face expressionless. Intimidating.

"You're her little brother, aren't you? I heard about you," Prepster was already worked up and started going a er Luke.

Wrong move, bud. Luke has a short fuse. You don't want to light that up.

"You've got some college girls on your roster, but stay out of mine. Leave this between your sister and me."

Luke looked hell bent on destroying this boy. "You better not have just confessed that."

"He did though," Jake shook his head, staring at the guy like it was a rookie mistake.

"What did I do?" prepster asked nervously.

"Tell us to stay out of your roster... you were seeing other girls while you were with Charlotte," Jake summarized.

Prepster began to lose his confidence, "No! No, I've been loyal, I swear! That's why I'm here. Your sister hasn't."

"Don't finish those words, preppy. I don't like you calling my sister names," Luke said, "Now it's your time to go."

Luke didn't need to raise his voice. Everyone understood that he wasn't afraid to get physical. And this argument was over because Luke said it was.

Preppy changed tack. He pleaded with Charlotte over Luke's shoulder, "Babe, I came all this way."

"I'll walk you to the door," Luke grabbed his arm.

"No!" he tried to fight back.

"Get out," Luke shoved him.

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Charlotte sat at the dining table with her salad discarded in front of her. She was emotional, and Nicole calmed her down.

Luke had sent her boyfriend packing. We heard the front door shut and we remained seated in silence. We waited for Luke to return.

Moments later, the dining room door opened, and Luke stood at the doorway.

Charlotte avoided his gaze and rushed past him, fleeing the room. Nicole followed her friend and, on her way out, she stopped to hug him.

"Thank you, Luke. You always take care of us, even though it should be the other way round," she hugged him again.

Luke came back to the table and sat down in his chair. The chairs on either side of him were empty. Dinner seemed a long-forgotten thought. He put his head in his hand.

Jake asked him, "Do you think Charlotte cheat."

"I don't know," Luke said, his head in his hand, "But she's my sister and I'll defend her every time."

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"Thanks for coming over, Millie. When I invited you for dinner, I didn't expect it to come with a show," Jake joked.

Or those brussel sprouts. I thought longingly of my abandoned mac'n'cheese. It didn't seem like a fair trade.

"I'm sorry for intruding on that," I said, embarrassed for having witnessed that, "It was so personal. I hope Charlotte's ok."

"She's fine. She's always involved in some drama."

Luke cleared his throat from behind us. I turned around and saw him leaning casually against the front door. His arms were crossed over his muscular chest and the porch light created a glow around his silhouette.

"I'm taking her home," Jake told him.

"No," Luke's voice was still intimidating, "Leave her with me."

"She's not your guest. I invited her to dinner."

"It's her over."

"It's ok," I intervened, touching Jake's arm comfortingly. I addressed Luke with less kindness, "Preppy is gone now so you can stop acting like the terminator, Luke."

"You have an opinion on the one to share with me, Millie?"

"No. I believe you're the one who interrupted our conversation to say something."

"I want to know what you're doing with Jake. He crossed a line when he asked you out and now you're here for dinner."

"Are you jealous?" I asked, "Or is it that you don't want me in your home? You never once invited me yourself."

"We barely knew each other."

I gasped. Was he really going to pull that line on me?! The classic playboy move of 'chill out, you're taking us too seriously.'

Honey, no.

"Luke!" a girl's voice called out from the side street in what has to be the worst timing ever.

Jamie, the coach's daughter, walked towards Luke's house. It was 10PM. She waved and Luke sighed. I glared at him. A er all the sweet words he's been feeding me, he's still seeing other girls?!

Now I won't call myself faultless, but there is a di erence between going over for a family dinner at Jake's house before going home alone... and a girl coming to see Luke alone at 10PM.

I was so glad I took things slow with him. It gave time for a boy's true colors to show.

"You've outdone yourself," I exhaled aggressively, "You act protective but then hold double standards for yourself. Jake didn't cross any lines, but you're out here blurring all of them."

I paused to take a deep breath. Part of me wanted to appreciate that last line - it came out pretty poetic - and the other part of me needed to calm down. Luke toyed with my emotions more than an Adele album.

"I can't believe I started to fall for you," I admitted, "Now back o before I run you over."

I realized that I was nowhere near my car, so I quickly added, "with the car parked across the street."

I stormed o. I marched across the street towards my house. The lights were on in the living room and I knew my mother was home. But I was fuming.

Luke didn't chase a er me. He greeted Jamie and invited her inside.

"You're in my head, Luke Dawson and I want to murder my memory of you."

Jamie walked into the house and waited for him, but he stayed still.

Luke was le standing by his front door. He looked out across the street and watched me go.

"I believe you Millie Ripley," he whispered sadly, "You'll run over any jerk who gets in your way."

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-3 hours earlier and POV Change-

Bianca and Oma ordered in quinoa bowls for dinner. There was a party in the town nearby that they were scheduled to attend in a couple hours.

"Is this girl coming or not?" Oma asked, finishing her meal on the couch, "We've waited over an hour."

"She's coming. Jamie's bringing her," Bianca answered, checking her phone again for any updates.

"Sage sighed, "I want to start getting ready for the party. Wait did you say Jamie's coming? The coach's daughter?"

"Yeah, Jamie also wants Luke, so we're united by a common goal," Bianca explained like it was obvious, "It was Jamie who found the source. Apparently, this girl has dirt on Millie from this summer. We'll take her down so easily now."

"Who's the source?"

Someone knocked on the door and both girls stood up to answer.

Jamie Gri ith, the basketball coach's daughter, walked in with another girl in tow. The source.

"I was hoping it wouldn't come to this," Jamie said, greeting them with not so much as a wave, "I thought Luke would forget about Millie as quickly as he discovered her."

"Unlikely. She was with us at Chad's house this a ernoon. Luke's never even invited you to that," Oma pointed out.

"I saw them at the groto as well so, yeah, I get it," Jamie said dryly.

"Let's cut to the chase," Bianca interrupted, not wanting to hear more of this, "Who did you bring?"

"I found out how Luke met Millie," Jamie said, perking up at their plan, "It was at Camp Beaver Hill. They were both summer counselors there at Apple Cabin. So I brought with me another counselor who was there for all the action."

"Hi," the girl stepped forward, "My name's Stacey."

A/N: It was Stacey!! Remember her? Eek, I loved reading your guesses in the last chapter. Took all my willpower not to respond.

Most popular guesses were for Julia and Flora... I can see you're ready for them to go down!

Don't worry, all will be resolved in due course.... :)