

### Trying to be a London girl: chapter 3

'Yeah Lisa, wohooo!!!', Steph, Felix, Jo and I scream when she gets handed her diploma by the dean, while mom and dad clap their hands in joy. The rest of the ceremony flies by in a blur. Tears, congratulations being exchanged, picture being taken and more tears. Even dad cries and he never cries. I hand him a handkerchief and ask 'Are you okay?' Das sniffs before he answers 'I'm fine. It's just you all grew up so fast. Look at your sister, she got the bachelor diploma in her hand and before we know it she'll be married and busy with her own family'.

Charlotte 'Gee, relax dad. She is only 23 I am pretty sure Lisa wants to finish her master degree first and work for a couple of years before she gets married'.

Dad looks at me and says 'Promise me that you'll take your time becoming a fully adult, yeah?', he hugs me.

Charlotte 'I will dad', I try to free myself from his hug, 'But seriously if you keep on hugging me like that, it will kill me. I can't breathe dad'.

Dad 'Oh yeah right sorry about that. I guess your old man got a bit sentimental today', he says cheekily while scratching the back of his neck. Something he always does when he feels embarrassed.

Charlotte 'It's fine, just try not to kill me the next time, will yaa?' with that being said I wonder off to find my cousin in the crowd. I finally spot him making out with a lanky, tall girl. Of course, I role my eyes while pushing my way through people to get to him.

Charlotte 'There you are! I've been looking everywhere for you, Jo', I say smiling while ignoring the girl hanging off his arm.

Jo a bit angry that I interrupted his 'make out session' asks 'What do you want?'

Charlotte 'Now, now is that the way of treating a loyal friend who has done nothing than be there for you while you went through your drug face? Let's not forgot the one time you called me in the middle of the night, crying on the other site of the phone, thinking you were gay? And that was only last week'. I have to bite my lip to keep me from laughing as I see the shocked girl whose expression is slowly turning into pure disgust, while Jo stares at me like I've suddenly grown a second head.

The girl whose name I don't know starts screaming 'You are gay?', while pointing at Jo.

Jo who clearly noticed the attention we are getting from the others says 'Will you keep your voice down? I am not gay!'

I give the girl a sympathetic look 'He is still struggling with it. What a shame, a hot guy like him playing for the opposite team?'. Before I get the chance to say anything else, Jo drags me into a corner, where he immediately confronts me 'What the hell is wrong with you? Why would you say something like that?'

Charlotte 'What do you mean?', I try to act innocent.

Jo 'Drop the act, you can't foul me with your puppy dog look'.

Charlotte 'Oh common it was funny'.

Jo 'It was everything but funny, Charlotte!'

Realising that my cousin is in no mood to be teased I breathe out, before explaining to him why I did it 'Seriously, why were you making out with that girl, what do you even see in her?', I point in disgust towards the girl who is already flirting with the next guy. So much for being shocked.

Jo 'She's a good kisser. Whatever it is non of your business', he argues.

Charlotte 'I am just looking out for you, please don't be mad. I just don't want to see you end up with the wrong girl'.

Seconds that feel like minutes we both stay silent. Jo is clearly thinking over my words. Then with a look back at the girl he says 'I guess it was pretty funny seeing her shocked face when you told her I was gay', a wave of relief washes over me when I see him grinning at me.

Charlotte 'So you are not mad at me anymore?'

Jo 'Nahh. You know I can't stay mad at you. But the next time please try not to embarrass me too much okay?'

Charlotte 'Okay'.

Jo 'Good, lets find the others again. Oh and just to let you know I'll pay you back for what you just did', he says with an evil glint in his eyes.

I link my arm through his and say 'Can't wait for it'.

'So what exactly will you be studying again, dear?', the guy seated next to me who is also one of my dad's business partners asks me for the third time. I don't get why all those random people are invited tonight. Oh right. Because they are influential people in the business world and are happy to offer my sister a job as soon as she is finished with her master degree, in exactly less than a year. So instead of getting annoyed at the guy for not remembering, I force a smile on my face and answer 'Fashion Management, in London'.

Mr Harrison, I believe his name is, 'Ahhh interesting. My son William will start his first term at an excellent university in London too next week'.

Charlotte 'Oh really, at which university?' I fake interest.

Mr Harrison 'London School of Economics and Political science. William will be majoring in business studies, like me and shortly after he'll take over the company hopefully', he announces proudly.

Charlotte 'You must be proud of him'. Even though I haven't met this William guy I feel bad for him. Must be pretty hard sometimes to fulfil his dad's expectations.

Mr Harrison 'Indeed I am. London School of Economics is a great choice. You should consider it; I'll be happy to make some phone calls for you'. I really want to give this arrogant, rich guy who unfortunately is my seat neighbour, a piece of my mind, but fortunately for him I have to keep all those words to me. That does not mean that I can't insult him in my thoughts though. Plus, my parents would be really disappointed if I dared to make a scene tonight, even when the guy is a complete asshole. So I concentrate on my food instead and answer politely 'That is really generous of you to offer Sir, I'll definitely give it a thought'. Seemingly happy with my answer he finally turns around to speak to the lady next to him without another glance towards me, not that I mind in the least bit.

He is exactly one of the reasons why I had zero interest in going tonight. I hate having those painfully conversations, where you can never say what you truly think, by the time the dinner is finished I am usually so worked up that there is no point in trying to get a few hours of sleep.

Fortunately for me tonight, we are going out, no need to worry about sleep.

Charlotte 'Thank god, I thought we never leave', after three hours of a painful dinner we were finally allowed to go and have some fun. Not without being told to act responsible and meet our parent's tomorrow at 10. am. for breakfast. No delays this time, mom warned us or more specifically Steph.

Stephanie 'This guy next to me kept whining about his wife. Apparently she left him after thirty years of marriage for a younger guy. And not even for a richer one. He is currently working as an electrician!'

Jo 'Ouch that really sucks'.

Lisa 'Why? I mean the guy is totally boring and the way he dresses', she shakes her head in disgust.

Stephanie 'He was not that bad. He is just going through a ruff time in his life. I am sure that his wife will come back to him'.

Lisa 'I didn't know you were into 60-year-old guys, Steph', she snorts.

Stephanie 'Oh shut your mouth, you know exactly that that is not true'.

Jo 'Wohaa stop arguing immediately both of you'.

Stephanie 'It is not my fault if she has no sense of...'

Lisa seemingly getting angrier by the second says 'Sense of what Stephanie?' This is where my frustration of this evening reaches the highest level and I yell 'That is enough both of you! I had to go through a whole dinner listening to a guy who thinks I am a complete failure! So forgive me if for once in my life I just want everyone to get along and enjoy this night!' My outburst seems to have rendered them speechless. Good.

After five minutes of complete silence Jo has the courage to say 'You know your little outburst right now really reminded me

of your mom'. For a reason I still don't know I start laughing soon being joined by everyone else in the car. My family is indeed strange. One minute we are about to kill each other and the next we are laughing together. But that is what makes us so special, we are different. Different is good. It means that we are never boring. No family wants to be boring and predictable, after all.

Charlotte 'Are you sure, you have the right address, sis?'

We are currently standing outside what looks like an abandoned building and the taxi driver took off as soon as the last person got out of the car. Wonderful.

Lisa 'Yes. That's the address Alexa sent me a couple of hours ago'.

Stephanie 'Well I don't know about you, but this building does not look like a perfect place to throw a party. In fact, the whole area...' Suddenly she jumps and cries out 'Was that a rat?'

Jo 'On the contrary, we are definitely in the right place'.

Surprised I turn towards him and ask 'How do you know?'

Jo gives me a confident smile before answering 'Easy. Where that guy comes from there is a party going on'.

I look in the direction he points to, Lisa 'You see one drunk guy, who by the way could also not only be drunk but homeless too and automatically assume there is a party going on?', she asks confused.

Jo 'Yes'.

Felix 'I don't know man'.

Jo 'Well you can stay if you want to, but I'm going to find it out. You're coming with me?', he asks me.

I'm not too fond of the idea to follow a drunk guy, but I'm not a chicken either and plus Jo is with me. Who am I kidding? The guy is scared of his own shadow. Nonetheless I answer 'Sure'.

Without another glance towards the others we walk in the direction of the dark alley, where the guy recently disappeared into.

Jo 'Have you got a lighter?'

Charlotte 'No I don't smoke and neither should you'.

Jo 'I was going to use it to get us some light, it's really dark here in case you haven't noticed'.

Charlotte 'No shit, Sherlock' I roll my eyes.

Jo 'So do you have one?'

Charlotte 'No, do you have your phone?'

I can hear him searching for it in his pant pockets before mumbling 'Shit'.

Charlotte 'Great, not only are we lost, but...' before I can finish my sentence Jo shushes me.

Jo 'Did you hear that?'

Charlotte 'Hear what?'

Jo 'I swear I could hear someone breathing...'

Charlotte 'Don't act like a baby'.

Jo starts to defend himself 'I'm not...' We got interrupted by something smashing against the container. Before I know it I jump Jo and we are both holding onto each other as if our lives depended on it, while we can hear someone in the darkness approaching us.

Charlotte 'I'm scared' I whine while we try our best to hide behind some bags full of trash. What if it was actually some psychopath who wants to kill us? I know, I know I've definitely watched too many episodes of Pretty Little Liars in the last couple of weeks, but the fact that we are currently in an abandoned alley and Jo is freaking out too, is not exactly helping me to calm down.

As if he was reading my thoughts he says 'Whatever is going to happen to us, I want you to know that I love you very much'.

Charlotte 'I love you too'. I shut my eyes and breathe his cologne in while waiting for a guy with a long knife to appear. The

steps and whispers are coming closer. Just great. Even more mentally disturbed people against whom will never stand any chance. That's it, I think. The next thing I know is someone touching my shoulder, me kicking our potential attacker in the face, Jo screaming like a girl, and Felix crying out in pain. Wait Felix?

Confused I look at a male figure lying on the floor, holding onto his nose in pain. I approach him ignoring Jo's whining and only when I see the slightly disordered curly hair I kneel down and ask 'Felix, is that you?'

Felix 'Of course it is me, who do you think it fucking was?', he asks me irritated.

Jo 'Should I call the police?'

Charlotte 'No need it is just Felix'. It is then that Jo has finally the courage to approach us and when he sees Felix on the ground he shouts 'Why the hell did you sneak up on us like that?'

Felix 'I did not sneak up on you guys! I decided to tell you that we found the party, since you two idiots decided to leave your phones with Steph'. Glaring towards me he adds 'You punched me, seriously?'

Being happy that it was Felix who followed us and not an actual creep I cheekily smile at him, while explaining 'I thought you were some psychopath who was trying to kill us. If I knew it was you I would have never punched you in the face in the first place. I'm really sorry'.

Felix 'Yeah, so is my nose'. At that Jo starts snorting, clearly failing at covering up his laughter.

Felix 'Care to explain what is so freaking funny?'

Jo 'Everything. You lying on the floor in pain, because my little cousin here hit you in the nose.'

Felix 'Your little cousin here, hits like a guy. And don't even think for one second that I didn't notice that it was you who was screaming like a girl.'

At that Jo immediately stops laughing and helps Felix up instead 'I'm sorry man. Let's go in and get you something to drink, it's on me'.

Felix 'I need more than one drink to get over the throbbing pain in my nose'.

I take his hand and explain 'It was self defence, I swear', I look at him pleadingly.

Felix 'I'm not mad at you. My ego just needs time to process what just happened', relieved I follow the two guys.

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