

Mistaking a Magnate for a Male Escort

chapter 1216

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Zachary seemed different from the last time Charlotte saw him two months ago.

He had lost a lot of weight, causing his features to become more defined than before. The knuckles on his hands seemed unusually prominent, while his sunken eyes conveyed a hollow, depressed gaze.

Zachary's carefully-styled hair had become long, messy locks, making him seem wilder and more mysterious than ever.

Charlotte's heart ached at the sight.

She felt deeply regretful when she saw his heartbroken gaze.

When Zachary lifted his head, she immediately retracted her gaze. She did not want him to notice that she had been staring.

Steeling herself, Charlotte cooled her demeanor and ignored his gaze. She lowered her eyes and walked further into the room.

Sherlyn exclaimed, "Charlotte! You've arrived just in time. Please explain everything to Mr. Nacht. He seems to have some sort of misunderstanding about Louis, or he might've been too busy and missed the news of your engagement. Why, he thought Louis took advantage of you, and he's interrogating him right now!"

"Mom..." Louis warned, "Please leave. We'll talk things through with Zachary, and you shouldn't be involved."

"What are you rushing me for?" Sherlyn eyed her son disapprovingly before assuming the persona of a welcoming host and addressing Zachary instead. "Mr. Nacht, welcome to our manor. You and Louis are great friends, and I'm happy to have you here as a guest. Feel free to stay for a few more days, so that you'll be around for Louis' wedding as well!"

Sherlyn's invitation reeked of insincerity and condescension.

"Mom, stop it."

Louis glanced at Zachary nervously and tried to push his mother out of the study room.

"Why are you pushing me?" Zachary's non-reaction fueled Sherlyn's insolence as she added, "This is my house, and I'm the host. I have every right to welcome him-"

"Mom, that's enough," Louis cut in and finally pushed his mother out the door.

Tensions remained high in the study room. Zachary had not exploded earlier because he did not care for Sherlyn's words at all; it had nothing to do with a good temper.

He only cared about Charlotte's opinion.

"I'm still waiting for an explanation," he said hoarsely, staring at Charlotte with an indecipherable gaze.

I'll believe whatever she says. I'll believe it over anything I saw with my own two eyes.

Charlotte refused to meet his gaze as she replied, "There's nothing left to explain. We have nothing to do with each other, and anything I do is none of your business."

Her calm words hurt Zachary more than Sherlyn's insults ever would.

He could let any insult slide off his back, but he was powerless in the face of Charlotte's words, which felt like daggers stabbing straight through his heart.

Zachary asked cautiously, "So, last night, did you and Louis really-"

He cut his sentence short as the scene he had witnessed the night before crossed his mind. The pain in his heart was unbearable.

The study room became eerily silent as he awaited Charlotte's answer.

Charlotte kept her head lowered as her hands kneaded her dress anxiously. She had no idea how to answer him. She wanted so badly to tell him that nothing had happened, yet last night's memories seemed to evade her.

I could tell him that I don't remember what happened last night, but it's just going to come across as a lame joke. He'll never believe that.

"Tell me!" Zachary suddenly shouted, his patience running thin.

His bellow frightened Louis, who had headed back to the study room after ushering his mother out.

"Louis, you need to take care of yourself!" Sherlyn stuffed something into his hands before she left.

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Louis stood at the doorway of the study room, staring at Zachary fearfully.

When he finally collected himself, he was surprised to discover a small handgun in his hand. Louis hastily stuffed the weapon into his shirt sleeve.

"What's it got to do with you?" Charlotte remained as hostile as before and continued, "I've cut ties with you since the moment you threw me out on the wedding and forced me to leave without my child. You have no right to interrogate me about the men I date or marry."

"Is this your way of saying that y-you were together last night?" Zachary seemed to ignore her statement, obsessed with only knowing what had happened the night before.

Charlotte steeled herself and answered, "Yes."

Technically, I was together with Louis last night. He's the one asking vague questions.

"Great! Just great!"

Zachary's hopes were utterly destroyed, along with his earlier composure. His gaze turned dangerous as he emanated a murderous aura.

He had initially thought that this was an elaborate hoax by the Laurent family to prevent him from reuniting with Charlotte and foiling her marriage plans with Louis.

In his imagination, Charlotte was a victim of drugging. Even if anything happened between Louis and her, he would forgive her if she was not a willing participant.

Charlotte's face was, however, devoid of any sadness or regret. Instead, she behaved as if she was trying to keep her distance from him.

She had not refuted anything that Sherlyn and Louis had said earlier.

And now, she had given him a direct answer to his pressing question.

Little by little, they chipped away at Zachary's fantasy of a loving reunion with Charlotte.

I should never have come here bearing false hope. She's changed a great deal since returning, and she's no longer the Charlotte of my past. How could this be?

Zachary's clenched fists were shaking with anger as he glared at Charlotte like a starved beast.

Charlotte continued to avoid his gaze as she declared, "Right then, everything's cleared up. Thank you for bringing Jamie to visit me, and I'd be grateful if you could allow him to stay for a few days. I'd

love to spend time with him and Ellie. You can take this time to accompany Robbie as well.”

She droned on about the children as if last night’s incident was nothing of consequence.

Unbeknownst to her, Zachary’s gaze was growing murderous at a frightful rate.

“You can even bring Robbie away with you for a couple of days as long as he’s agreeable to it.” Charlotte took a deep breath before saying her farewells. “That’s all I have to say. Goodbye.”

She was about to leave when Zachary lunged at her and pinned her against the couch.

“Zachary!” Louis rushed forward but was stopped by Ben.

“Ms. Lindberg!” Morgan was about to do the same when Marino pulled her back.

Zachary held Charlotte by her chin and gritted out, “Charlotte! Do you know how hard I’ve been trying to resolve the feud between the Lindbergs and the Nachts? I’ve been racking my brains for ways to approach you and make things up to you.”

He continued impassioned, “I even risked my life to find you. Whenever I was on the brink of death, the thought of you filled me with hope and the determination to survive. I did all this because I believed you would be awaiting my return as eagerly as I anticipated our reunion. But it looks like I was wrong. You couldn’t even wait one night. You threw yourself into another man’s arms despite knowing that I was coming to get you today.”

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“Everything I did was a joke to you! An utter joke!” Zachary’s voice had lost its usual charm. Instead, it had turned hoarse with dejection.

He sounded both sad and spiteful.

Charlotte refused to allow her heart to soften. “We could never go back to the way things used to be. It’s far too late.”

“Look at me, Charlotte.” Zachary desperately clung to his hopes for a reunion. He cupped her cheeks and forced her to meet his gaze. “Tell me you were forced and sabotaged. As long as you didn’t agree to any of this, I’ll forgive you!”

At that moment, Zachary had sunk to the lowest point of his life.

He had never begged so pitifully for a woman before, to the point of tossing aside all his pride. Nonetheless, it was a worthwhile sacrifice if he could regain her trust and love.

Charlotte’s eyes welled with tears as she took in his bloodshot eyes.

She had never seen him in such anguish, and she could not help but sympathize with him.

Regret and hatred filled her soul, urging her to confess that she had not voluntarily agreed to this marriage, that she had no idea what had happened.

“Talk to me!” Zachary bellowed impatiently. He needed to hear the words from her own mouth.

I’ll believe anything she says.

“I-I-” Charlotte was about to say something when Zachary stiffened at the sight of the bruises along her neck and collarbone.

He tore apart her blouse viciously, and his world came crashing down the moment he saw the hickeys littered on her chest.

Charlotte followed his gaze and froze, realizing that she had no way of explaining herself now.

“Charlotte! Y-You! How could you do this to me? Why would you?” Zachary was going mad with rage.

He suddenly punched a fist forward, causing Charlotte to close her eyes and wince subconsciously.

The fist whooshed past her and landed in an antique vase behind her.

The vase instantly shattered into pieces, some of which landed on Charlotte’s face and body. One of the pieces slashed her cheek, and blood trickled down her face.

Zachary’s bloody fist was full of cuts.

Morgan tried to rush to Charlotte’s aid but to no avail as Marino continued holding her back.

“Zachary, what the hell are you doing?” Louis finally lost his composure and whipped out the gun in his sleeve. He yelled, “Let go of her!”

Ben was taken aback at his actions, having never expected the typically gentle Louis to point a gun at someone else.

He had perhaps lowered his guard far too much against Louis.

“Sir Louis, please stay calm and put the gun down,” coaxed Ben.

Louis seemed impervious to the bodyguard’s words as he continued pointing the gun shakily at Zachary. “I said, let go of Charlotte! She’s my fiancée, and I won’t allow you to treat her like this!”

“Your fiancée?” Zachary sneered, though he gradually loosened his hold on Charlotte. Turning around, he stared at Louis patronizingly and said, “You were still out of the picture when she was giving birth to our kids.”

“Y-You,” Louis sputtered awkwardly.

Zachary swiped the gun from his hand in a flash. He pointed it at Louis' chest. "I treated you like my brother, but you stole my woman, and now you're here pointing a gun at me!"

Louis' eyes widened in fear. "I-" The words froze up in his throat.

Zachary switched off the safety and threatened, "I'll kill you right now, and she won't have to walk down the aisle. Go to hell!"

"No!" Charlotte ran forward and stood between him and Louis. "Zachary, don't be rash."

He clenched his jaw and glared at her. "You're protecting him? Do you think I won't shoot you?"

Charlotte explained hurriedly, "Don't do anything stupid. There are royal forces from F Nation surrounding this place. You shouldn't put yourself at risk for me."

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Zachary scoffed in response. "The royal forces? Do you really think that would scare me?"

He then pointed his gun at the ceiling and fired several successive shots.

Bang! Bang!

The bullets struck the chandelier on the ceiling, sending crystals raining down.

Just then, the door to the study room burst open, and dozens of armed soldiers rushed into the room. More soldiers stood outside the window of the study room, and all of them trained their guns at Zachary.

Sherlyn entered the room last, flanked by more armed men.

“Put down the gun if you want to live, Zachary.” She had a gun pointed at him as well.

Louis exclaimed, “Mom, what are you doing?” He had never imagined that his mother would cause such a scene.

While he pointed his gun at Zachary to protect Charlotte, his mother’s actions represented the Laurents’ declaration of war against the Nacht family.

It was wholly unnecessary and out of line.

Zachary burst into laughter. “Did you think you could stop me with dozens of soldiers?”

Sherlyn remained painfully ignorant of the danger ahead. “Such insolence! Even if you’re not scared of our soldiers, there’s still the Lindberg family, and we have Mr. Lindberg’s best men with us. There’s no way you’d be able to escape!”

“Mom, stop it,” Louis pleaded nervously.

“Lady Sherlyn, it seems like you’ve been sheltered for far too long. I pity your ignorance about the evils of the outside world.”

The soldiers outside the window suddenly crumpled over just as Zachary finished his sentence.

Dumbfounded, Sherlyn could only watch as bodyguards from the Nacht family stormed into the study room before neutralizing her men.

“Y-You,” she stuttered in disbelief.

Robert had arrived home just then, and he immediately apologized. “Zachary, please have mercy on us!”

He added pleadingly, “Please accept my apology on behalf of my wife; she doesn’t know any better. Our families have been on good terms for many years, especially Mr. Nacht. It would be such a shame to ruin our relationship over such a minor issue.”

“A minor issue?” Zachary asked, though he kept his piercing gaze on Charlotte.

“Whatever it was, there’s no need to bring death into the equation.” Robert hastily changed tack and offered an olive branch. “Let’s sit down and have a talk over this, shall we? We shouldn’t exchange arms at all costs. Please accept my suggestion for my sake, all right?”

Zachary tossed the gun in his hand to Robert. “I wanted to have a peaceful talk, but Lady Sherlyn is being impolite. This gun belongs to your family.”

Robert knew at first glance that the gun belonged to Sherlyn. He wanted desperately to tell off his wife right then and there, but the urgency of the situation demanded him to first bow to Zachary in apology.

“Please accept my deepest apologies over Sherlyn’s and Louis’ behavior. On account of our families’ good relationship and the sake of your grandfather, I hope you can be the bigger person and forgive our transgressions!”

“What are you doing?” Sherlyn was dumbfounded at her husband’s meek demeanor. Zachary’s the one in his territory, for God’s sake!

Robert roared impatiently, “Shut up! Must you carry on like this until Louis’ life is in danger?”

Sherlyn swallowed her displeasure and kept quiet.

Charlotte chimed in, “Zachary, let’s talk through this alone instead of making a scene. The children are still in the manor, and I’m sure they’ll be upset if they find out about this.”

The mention of their children worked wonders in soothing Zachary’s mood.

Gone was the murderous gaze, though anger and hatred still swirled in the depths of his eyes. “There’s nothing left to say. I’m bringing all three kids with me!”

He turned to leave.

“Zachary! What do you mean? We’ve discussed this; Robbie stays with me,” Charlotte yelled and chased after him.

He replied without even turning back, “Too bad, I’ve changed my mind. I won’t allow my son to call someone else ‘Dad.’ They’re my kids, and they’re coming with me. That’s final!”

“Y-You-” Charlotte was tongue-tied at his audacity.