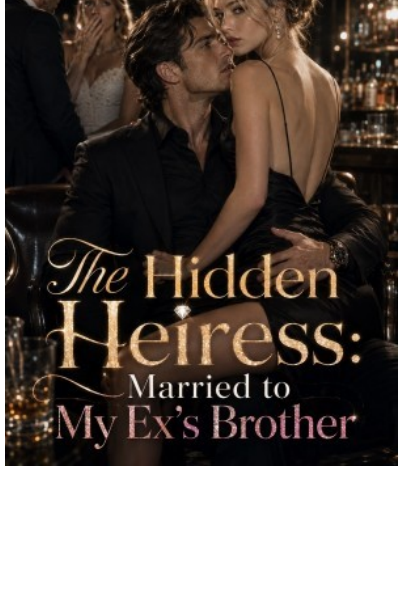




When Charlotte Whitfield found out her boyfriend of five years, Jasper Sinclair, had secretly married another woman, she didn't cry or beg. She walked straight into a picked the one man Jasper couldn't stand—his older half-brother, Alexander Sinclair—and planted herself on his lap. She thought it was just one reckless night of revenge. She thought the cheater would never know what he'd really lost. Because the girl Jasper dismissed as "poor and useless"? She's actually the sole heir to the Whitfield Group—a billion-dollar empire. A tech genius. A top-tier designer. The queen of finance... And that cold, ruthless CEO everyone's terrified of—the one rumored to have even turned on his own father? Alexander Sinclair is now gently cradling her baby bump, murmuring with a low laugh in her ear: "I know you're carrying my child. So... when are going to marry me?"

Introduction

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Chapter 1

"Jasper, you've been married to Serena for two days, and you still haven't told Charlotte? You dated her for five years. That's cold, man."

"Honestly, Charlotte's gorgeous. Kind of a waste."

Charlotte's fingers clenched around the door handle.

She had come here tonight to tell Jasper a secret. A life-changing one.

Now her whole body felt cold.

Jasper's familiar voice came through the door, smug and careless.

"So what if she's pretty?"

"My mom married into the Sinclair family," Jasper said. "I'm not the bastard everyone looks down on anymore. Charlotte? She's just a broke girl with a pretty face. She doesn't belong beside me. And don't let her find out yet. She'll make a scene."

"Damn," another man said. "So Serena is the upgrade?"

"She's a Wainwright. Her family has money, connections, influence." Jasper's tone sharpened. "My place in the Sinclair family still isn't secure. My father still values Alexander more. With Serena's family backing me, I actually have a shot."

Alexander Sinclair.

Jasper's older half-brother.

The legitimate heir of the Sinclair family.

Jasper hated that name because it reminded him that even with the Sinclair last name, he still wasn't sitting at the top table.

"You don't love Charlotte anymore?" someone asked.

"Don't be childish," Jasper snapped. "Love doesn't get you shares. Love doesn't give you control."

Charlotte felt like someone had punched the air out of her lungs.

He used to tell her love was enough.

He said he didn't care about luxury, status, or anyone's approval. He said all he needed was her by his side.

Clearly, the second his mother became Mrs. Sinclair, love became cheap.

"How long have you and Serena been together? That marriage license came out of nowhere."

Jasper gave a low laugh. "She seduced me and climbed into my bed three years ago. She even became friends with Charlotte because of me."

"Bro. That's wild. What if Charlotte finds out?"

"She's slow," Jasper said. " Besides, I bought her a birthday gift. She's easy to calm down."

Easy to calm down?

Charlotte took one slow breath.

Then she kicked the door open.

Jasper sat on the leather couch, a glass in his hand. The second he saw her, the glass slipped from his fingers and hit the floor.

"Charlotte?" His face went white. "What are you doing here?"

She walked in slowly and looked around.

Tailored suits. Expensive liquor. Cheap souls.

"Wow," she said. "So this is where insecure men rehearse villain speeches."

Several men shifted uncomfortably.

Jasper shot to his feet so fast he almost knocked over the table. "Wait, Charlotte. Let's talk outside. Don't make a scene."

She stepped back before he could touch her. "Why? You were brave enough when the door was closed."

"It's not what you heard. Don't twist this into something—"

Charlotte grabbed the bottle from the table and swung.

"Go to hell, you lying bastard!"

The bottle cracked against Jasper's head.

Blood ran down the side of his face.

The room exploded.

"Oh my God!"

"Dude!"

Jasper screamed, one hand flying to his head. "Charlotte, are you insane?"

Charlotte's chest rose and fell, rage crawling up her spine. "From this second on, we're done."

"Charlotte—"

"Shut up," she snapped. "Unless you want another one."

Jasper froze, blood leaking between his fingers.

Charlotte looked him over, disgust twisting in her stomach.

"Enjoy your marriage," she said. "A cheater and a homewrecker. You and Serena really are perfect."

Then she turned and walked out.

Only when she reached the private lounge next door did her hands start shaking.

Charlotte had always thought her relationship with Jasper was steady. She had never been against intimacy, but he always told her a girl should respect herself. Wait until marriage. Stay pure. Be patient.

Turns out, it was never respect.

He already had someone else in his bed.

She ordered far too much alcohol and drank glass after glass, letting the burn numb the sharpest parts of the pain.

Bastard.

Liar.

Selfish piece of trash.

The room blurred around her. Bass shook through the floor. Neon lights swept over the bar. People laughed, danced, flirted, and lost themselves for the night.

If Jasper could cheat, why couldn't she find someone else?

Charlotte pushed herself out of the lounge.

A blond guy in a shiny shirt stepped into her path with a lazy grin.

"Hey, beautiful. You alone?"

Charlotte looked him up and down.

"I'm not that desperate tonight."

She walked straight past him.

Then she saw him.

The club was dim, but he still stood out.

A man sat with one leg crossed, a glass of whiskey loose in his hand. His face was half-hidden in shadow, but the sharp line of his nose and brow caught the light.

He looked a little like Jasper.

But Jasper looked like a boy trying too hard to prove he belonged.

Alexander Sinclair looked like a man who owned the room and found everyone in it boring.

Charlotte stared at him.

Her drunk, furious mind connected three dangerous facts.

Jasper betrayed her.

Jasper hated Alexander.

Alexander was revenge in a custom suit.

Was this smart?

Absolutely not.

Was Charlotte in the mood to be smart?

Not even close.

Before her common sense could catch up, she walked between Alexander's legs and sat right on his lap.

"Hey, handsome," she said. "Want to do something crazy?"

The people nearby sucked in sharp breaths, clearly waiting for Alexander to throw her off.

He didn't.

His hands settled on her waist, firm and steady. His voice was low, almost cold.

"You've got the wrong man, my future sister-in-law."

That word pissed her off.

Sister-in-law.

Charlotte pretended not to hear it. She wrapped her arms around his neck and leaned close, her lips nearly brushing his.

"No," she whispered. "I came for you, big brother."

Then she kissed him.

Messy. Angry. Hot.

Kissing her ex-fiancé's older brother in the middle of a packed club was not something a good girl did.

Lucky for her, Charlotte was officially done being good.

Alexander's eyes narrowed, curiosity flashing through them.

He let her kiss him for a moment, then caught her jaw.

"So," he murmured against her mouth, "my brother couldn't satisfy you?"

Charlotte let out a breathless laugh, still half-slumped against him. "I dumped him. If you're not interested, I'll find someone else."

She meant it.

She wasn't begging any man tonight.

She started to pull back.

Alexander's arm locked around her waist and dragged her firmly back against him.

Then he stood, lifting her like she weighed nothing, and carried her toward the private elevator.

"Too late for that."

The elevator doors slid shut.

Alexander didn't give her time to think. His long fingers curved around the back of her neck, and his mouth found hers again.

This kiss was different.

Slower at first. Deeper. Controlled.

Then it turned demanding.

His hand slid to her waist, moving upward through the thin fabric of her dress. Charlotte's back hit the cool elevator wall, but all she felt was the heat of his body crowding hers.

Her heart hammered.

Her anger blurred into something hotter, darker, harder to deny.

Alexander's lips moved from her mouth to her jaw, then lower, along the side of her neck.

His voice dropped against her skin. "Who kisses better? Me or Jasper?"

Charlotte's eyes fluttered.

"You," she said without hesitation. "He's nothing."

And the worst part?

She meant it.

Jasper had always kissed like everything was about him. His pace. His mood. His pleasure.

Alexander kissed like he noticed every breath she took.

"Low-class broke girl?"

The words Jasper had said earlier almost made her laugh now.

Because Jasper Sinclair had no idea.

Charlotte Whitfield was not poor.

She was the granddaughter of the retired chairman of Whitfield Group.

The only heir.

The future owner of a business empire so large that the Whitfield name was not just a name. It was access. It was power. It was a weapon.

And Charlotte had hidden all of it.

She hated the fake smiles people wore when they found out. The sudden compliments. The careful flattery.

She hadn't wanted a man who loved Whitfield Group.

She had wanted a man who loved her.

Just Charlotte.

Now she knew how naive that was.

Jasper had been tested without even knowing it.

And he had failed so badly it was almost impressive.

The cruelest part?

She had planned to tell him the truth tonight.

Instead, he had married Serena Wainwright.

A family that meant almost nothing beside Whitfield Group.

Charlotte closed her eyes as Alexander's hand tightened at her waist.

Congratulations, Jasper.

You just threw away the one thing you were desperate to get.

And he had no idea what he had lost tonight.