

Chapter 5

"Charlotte? Mr. Whitfield's granddaughter?" Serena let out a sharp laugh and pointed straight at her. "Please. That's the funniest thing I've heard all night. Right, Jasper?"

Jasper's eyes were still fixed on Charlotte.

For some reason, he didn't laugh right away.

The way she stood there bothered him.

No panic. No shame. No desperate need to explain herself.

This was not the Charlotte he remembered.

And that made him uneasy.

Serena noticed his hesitation. Her nails dug into his sleeve.

"Jasper," she snapped.

He finally looked at her.

Serena forced a sweet smile, leaned close, and hissed through her teeth, "Say something."

Jasper cleared his throat. "Baby, don't waste your energy on someone irrelevant."

Charlotte smiled.

Irrelevant?

If not for her, Jasper wouldn't have even made it into Princeton. Back then, his scores had fallen short, and he'd acted like the world had ended

...

Charlotte had felt bad for him.

So she begged her grandfather to quietly pull some strings.

Jasper got in and called it fate.

And those "genius research results" he loved bragging about? Charlotte had rewritten most of them for him.

His so-called luck had her fingerprints all over it.

How embarrassing.

"Irrelevant?" Serena turned back to the crowd, clearly enjoying the attention. "Doesn't look that way to me. Everyone knows Charlotte has been chasing my husband for years."

Whispers started spreading.

"Wait, they dated?"

"So she's the ex?"

"That's messy."

Serena lifted her chin. "Last time, she followed us to a restaurant. Now she shows up here too? That's not a coincidence. She found out Jasper is a Sinclair and suddenly can't let go."

Years ago, when Serena wanted Jasper, she had stuck to Charlotte like glue. Called her babe. Borrowed her clothes. Asked about Jasper. Pretended to be the perfect friend.

Honestly, Charlotte preferred this version.

At least the snake had stopped wearing perfume.

"Not everyone wants your trash," Charlotte said coolly. "The man you're so proud of is just garbage with a haircut."

Someone nearby coughed awkwardly.

Jasper's face darkened.

Being called garbage in public clearly bruised that fragile little ego.

Charlotte looked at Serena. "Didn't the slap at the restaurant teach you anything? Or were you feeling brave because I didn't post the photos of Jasper begging me on his knees?"

Serena's face flushed red.

Charlotte smiled faintly. "I gave you one chance to shut up, and you chose to bark again. Next time, should I bring you a leash?"

Up on the second-floor balcony, Alexander Sinclair watched the scene below with quiet amusement.

He had stepped out for air because the party was painfully boring. Too many fake smiles. Too much expensive champagne. Too many people pretending they weren't all hunting for advantage.

Then Charlotte showed up.

And suddenly, the night had entertainment.

The woman had claws.

Serena finally lost control.

"What gives you the right to act so superior?" she shouted. "Security! Throw her out. Now!"

A security guard stepped forward, looking uncomfortable but obligated.

"Ma'am," he said to Charlotte, "this is a private event. May I see your invitation?"

Charlotte reached for her clutch.

The invitation was inside.

Alistair had arranged everything even though he wasn't attending.

But before she could take it out, a hand settled lightly on her shoulder.

A lazy voice spoke beside her.

"She's with me."

The crowd stirred.

Charlotte turned her head.

Alexander Sinclair stood next to her in a black suit, tall, cold, and impossible to ignore.

At nearly six foot three, he towered over most of the room. His hair was swept back, showing his sharp features and calm, dangerous eyes. Several guests took a subtle step back without realizing it.

He and Charlotte stood under the crystal lights, both dressed in black.

For one brief second, they looked like they had arrived together on purpose.

"That's Alexander Sinclair."

"Jasper's brother."

"The real heir."

"Are they together?"

Jasper's gaze dropped to Alexander's hand on Charlotte's shoulder.

Something ugly twisted in his chest.

Why was Alexander touching her?

And why was Charlotte letting him?

Alexander looked at Jasper. His voice was calm, but loud enough for everyone nearby to hear.

"Jasper Sinclair. This is pathetic, even for you."

Jasper's jaw tightened. "Alexander."

"You let your new wife smear the woman you cheated on for three years," Alexander said. "All because your mother finally married into money and you think that makes you important?"

The room went quiet.

Then the whispers hit.

"So Serena was the other woman?"

"Oh my God."

"She called the ex shameless?"

"The Wainwrights are going to hate this."

"Jasper Sinclair is trash."

Serena's face went white. "I am not a mistress!"

Alexander looked at her. "Of course you'd say that. Mistresses usually hate accurate job titles."

A few people struggled not to laugh.

Alexander continued, his tone almost bored. "And Mrs. Sinclair got into the family the same way, didn't she? History repeats itself. If a mistress waits long enough, her son can dress up as an heir."

Jasper's face turned red. "You bastard. Father won't let you get away with this."

"Careful," Alexander said. "You're at a public event. Don't embarrass your new sponsors."

Charlotte laughed before she could stop herself.

She hadn't needed Alexander to step in.

But she had to admit, the man knew how to drop a bomb and walk away clean.

Alexander leaned closer, his lips near her ear.

"Little hellcat," he murmured, "I helped you again."

"You didn't help me. You used me to hit Jasper."

"Can't it be both?"

"No."

His breath brushed her ear. "So strict."

Across the ballroom, Serena looked ready to explode.

She glared at Charlotte, then turned to Jasper, only to find him looking in Charlotte's direction again.

That did it.

Serena stepped in front of him, blocking his view.

"Still looking?" she hissed. "Jasper Sinclair, are you seriously still hung up on her?"

Jasper's patience snapped. "I married you, Serena. Can you stop acting crazy for five seconds?"

Her eyes widened. "Crazy? Everyone is calling me the other woman, and you haven't defended me once."

He took her hand and forced a gentle smile. "Listen. We represent the Sinclairs and the Wainwrights. We can't lose control here. Smile, breathe, and move past it."

Serena's chest rose and fell, but she forced herself to stay quiet.

When Jasper looked back toward Charlotte again, she was gone.

So was Alexander.

At that moment, Alexander was pulling Charlotte into a private restroom.

Charlotte yanked her wrist free and turned on him.

"Mr. Sinclair," she said coldly, "what do you think you're doing?"

"Relax."

"When men say that, they're usually about to do something deeply unrelaxing."

He stepped closer.

She stepped back.

Alexander stopped in front of her, blocking part of the light. The scent of cedar and mint wrapped around her.

That same scent from the morning after.

The one she had tried very hard not to remember.

"How are you planning to thank me this time?" he asked. "And don't say dinner."

His warm breath touched her cheek, and heat rushed to her face.

She turned her head away. "I didn't ask you to come. And honestly, you didn't do much."

"You're always this ungrateful?" His mouth curved. "Without me, you would've been escorted out. Now everyone knows Serena was the homewrecker. I'd call that helpful."

"You did it for yourself," Charlotte said. "And you enjoyed it."

"I enjoy a lot of things."

His gaze dropped to her lips.

"For example..."

He lowered his head.

Charlotte's heart kicked hard.

She hated that her body reacted before her brain could shut it down.

She lifted her hand and covered her mouth.

Alexander paused.

Then, instead of kissing her lips, he lowered his head and brushed his mouth along the side of her neck.

"Alexander," she warned, stiffening.

Too late.

He bit down where her neck met her collarbone, firm and possessive.

A sharp sting shot through her.

A deep red mark stood out against her pale skin.

Chapter Comments



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