

Chapter 6

"Are you out of your mind?" Charlotte yelped as a sharp sting burned across her neck.

She shoved Alexander back and snapped her gaze toward the mirror.

A red mark bloomed on the side of her neck, bold as a neon sign. She rubbed at it, which only made it worse.

She spun on Alexander, heat flaring through her chest. "You..."

For once, words failed her.

The mark was impossible to hide. She had walked in looking normal. If she walked out like this, every bored rich wife in the building would have a new scandal to chew on before dessert.

Alexander watched her with dark, unreadable eyes. "What's wrong? Afraid Jasper Sinclair might get the wrong idea?"

Charlotte let out a sharp laugh. "Afraid? Please. I'm single. Painfully, legally, gloriously single. I'm not somebody's wife sneaking around."

His mouth curved. "Then maybe we should make it more believable."

She narrowed her eyes. "What is that supposed to mean?"

She didn't get to finish.

Alexander stepped in, caught her waist, and kissed her.

Not softly. Not sweetly.

He kissed her like he was trying to start a war.

His woodsy cologne rushed into her lungs, warm and dangerous. His eyes stayed open, locked on hers, dark enough to swallow her whole. Charlotte's fingers shoved against his chest, but he clamped one hand behind her head and held her there.

Then his teeth caught her lower lip.

A jolt shot through her. Her heart slammed once, violent and stupid. She bit back a sound, furious at him and even more furious at her own body for reacting.

This wasn't even a kiss anymore. It was a fight with lips involved.

When Alexander finally pulled away, Charlotte's mouth was swollen, her breath uneven, and her patience officially dead.

"You did that on purpose," she snapped.

His shirt was rumpled, collar tugged loose. He lifted one brow. "Did I?"

"Don't play dumb. It doesn't suit your whole evil-billionaire-in-a-tailored-suit vibe." Her eyes flashed. "You're trying to provoke Jasper."

Alexander said nothing.

Charlotte wiped the corner of her mouth with her thumb. "Bad news, genius. Your little plan won't work. He has a wife now. He doesn't get to be jealous."

Her voice was cold. She was done.

Without waiting for Alexander to answer, she turned and yanked the restroom door open.

And walked straight into Jasper Sinclair.

Jasper had sent Serena upstairs earlier, then spent the last several minutes looking for Charlotte. The second he saw her, he strode over, face tight and eyes frantic.

"Charlotte." His voice dropped, soft and urgent. "Don't take what Serena said seriously. None of it matters. It's all for show. You know the one I care about is you."

Charlotte stared at him like he had just crawled out of a sewer and asked for a hug.

Jasper kept going, desperate now. "She's jealous. Controlling.

Impossible. I told you I'd leave her, and I meant it. Just give me a little more time, okay?"

Then his gaze landed on her neck.

The red mark.

Then her lips.

Still swollen.

His expression froze. "What happened to you?"

Charlotte's fingers curled at her side.

Jasper reached for her. "Who did this?"

She slapped his hand away. "Why do you care? Move."

Behind her, the restroom door opened wider.

Alexander stepped out as if he had been waiting for his cue. He slid an arm around Charlotte's waist and pulled her against him, wearing a smirk that deserved criminal charges.

"It's not exactly a murder mystery," he said.

Jasper's face drained of color. "You... both of you?" His voice cracked with disbelief. "Why were you in there together? What the hell happened?"

Charlotte opened her mouth, but Alexander beat her to it.

"Whatever your imagination is screaming at you right now?" he drawled. "Yeah. That."

Charlotte's jaw nearly hit the floor.

Jasper looked like someone had unplugged his brain. "That's impossible."

Charlotte recovered first. Fast.

She gave Jasper a sweet, razor-edged smile. "Impossible? Great. Next

time we sleep together, I'll send you a calendar invite."

Alexander's eyes flicked toward her.

Even he hadn't expected that.

For a second, Charlotte wondered if she had gone too far. Then she saw Jasper's face twist with rage and decided no, actually, she had gone exactly far enough.

"You're doing this to punish me," Jasper said, eyes bloodshot. "There's no way this is real. You're just trying to piss me off."

Charlotte tilted her head. "Says who?"

Before Jasper could answer, she grabbed Alexander by the collar and yanked him down.

Then she kissed him.

Right in front of Jasper.

Alexander froze for half a second. Then he let her.

He didn't push her away. Didn't ruin it. Just stood there while Charlotte kissed him like she had every right to.

And maybe she did.

When she pulled back, her pulse was kicking hard, but her voice stayed icy.

"Did you see that clearly enough, or should I do a replay?"

Jasper's face went tight with pain. "No. You're only doing this to make me jealous. Charlotte, stop hurting yourself like this."

For one ugly second, Charlotte saw the truth in his eyes.

He did still want her.

He just wanted the Sinclair name more.

Money. Power. Status. Legitimacy.

Jasper had spent his whole life hating the word bastard, and he had sold his soul for a cleaner last name.

He reached for Charlotte's hand again, as if he could still pull her away and rewrite the scene.

A furious voice sliced through the air.

"Charlotte, seriously?"

Serena stormed toward them, rage in every step. Her face was flushed, her eyes bright with humiliation.

"I leave for five minutes, and you're already throwing yourself at my husband again?"

Her hand flew up.

Charlotte's eyes sharpened.

Serena didn't even get close.

Charlotte caught her wrist midair, clamped down hard, then lifted her own hand and slapped Serena across the face.

The crack echoed through the hallway.

Every head nearby turned.

Serena stumbled back, one hand flying to her cheek. Her eyes went wide. "You hit me? Again!"

Charlotte's expression turned glacial. She looked beautiful, cold, and absolutely done.

"That slap was me being polite."

Serena's lips trembled with rage.

Charlotte leaned in slightly, voice low enough to cut deeper. "You think every woman is as desperate as you? I threw Jasper out like expired leftovers. You digging him out of the trash doesn't make him a prize."

Jasper's face darkened.

Then she pulled out her phone and tapped the screen.

A recording started playing.

Jasper's voice filled the space, clear and damning.

"Charlotte, don't stoop to her level. I don't love Serena. It's always been you. She's controlling, suspicious. I told you I'd divorce her, and I meant it. Just give me more time, please."

Silence dropped like a blade.

Jasper went pale.

Serena slowly turned her head toward him, eyes burning.

Panic flashed across Jasper's face. "Babe, listen to me. You've got it wrong. She came out of the bathroom with her clothes all messed up and tried to seduce me."

Serena's chest rose and fell. Her nails dug into her palms.

"We'll talk about this at home," she snapped.

Then, because apparently dignity had packed a bag and left her years ago, Serena turned her glare back on Charlotte.

"My husband already explained. You were the one chasing him."

Charlotte stared at her.

Then she laughed.

She had known Jasper was shameless. She just hadn't realized he had found a woman willing to carry his lies around like designer luggage.

Charlotte lifted her hand again.

Smack.

This time, her palm landed across Jasper's face.

His head jerked to the side.

Gasps rippled through the nearby guests.

Charlotte looked him up and down like he was something stuck to the bottom of her shoe.

"Pathetic."

Then she turned and walked away.

Behind her, Serena stood frozen, fists clenched, cheek still burning. Everyone had seen it. The slap. The recording. The humiliation.

Her pride screamed louder than the sting on her face.

She wasn't going to let Charlotte walk away from this.

Not after making her look like a fool in front of half the room.

"Stop right there!" Serena shouted at Charlotte's back.

Chapter Comments



