

The Mocked Miss's Hidden Crowns – Chapter 16 |

"Aargh!"

Scarman barely managed to get up before the guy with glasses crashed into him again. Both of them ended up sprawled on the ground, moaning and cursing.

Sensing things were about to get ugly, the other two men rushed in together.

Charlotte's lips curled into a sly smile. She grabbed one guy by the shoulders, vaulted up, and sent a spinning kick right across the other man's face.

He stumbled back, dropped to one knee, and when he touched his nose, his fingers came away bloody. What the hell was going on?

The last guy just stood there, staring at Charlotte like he'd seen a ghost. He barely got his mouth open to beg for mercy before she slapped him across the face, punched him hard on the other side, and finished him off with a brutal hit between the legs. He dropped, clutching himself, face twisted in pain.

Charlotte stood there, totally calm, rubbing her wrist. She pointed at Scarman, her voice sharp and impatient. "Pick up the milk."

The four men exchanged glances, suddenly stone-cold sober. How had they just lost to a girl who looked barely old enough for high school? Must've been the booze.

Scarman struggled to his feet, yanked a knife from his pocket, and his eyes burned red with anger. "Kill that little bitch!"

The four of them charged again.

Charlotte just rolled her eyes. "Idiots."

Whatever. It had been way too long since she'd had a good fight.

She was just about to jump in when a metal rod flew past her, smacking straight into Scarman's hand.

The knife clattered to the ground, the sound ringing out in the night.

"Who the hell just hit me?" Scarman shouted, clutching his hand and looking around wildly.

Suddenly, headlights blazed behind them, flooding the alley with harsh white light. The men shielded their eyes.

From where she stood, Charlotte could make out a slate-blue Bugatti parked with reckless confidence in the dark. A tall man in a black suit leaned against

the car door, cigarette pinched between his fingers, the kind of presence you could feel in your bones.

A few seconds later, he flicked the ash from his cigarette, lips quirking in a lazy smile.

"Picking on a girl? Really?"

It was him.

Charlotte dropped her gaze and stood still.

Bullying? Who was bullying who, exactly?

Honestly, anyone watching would think she'd been practicing martial arts since she could walk.

Scarman, still clutching his chest, glared at the stranger. "Who the hell are you? Mind your own business and get lost."

Anthony arched an eyebrow,
cigarette still hanging from his lips.

He took off his suit jacket, walked over and
raped it over Charlotte's shoulders, giving the back of her
head a gentle pat. "Step back Close your eyes if you're scared.

He must not have seen her fight.

Fine.

Charlotte pursed her lips, took two steps back, and watched him with big, clear eyes.

Scared? Not a chance.

Anthony rolled up his sleeves as he walked, a cold edge in his eyes that sent a chill through the alley.

"What... what do you want?" one of the men stammered. The guy was huge, but next to Anthony, he looked like nothing.

"Your life," Anthony said, voice flat and icy. Without warning, he kicked Scarman right in the shin.

A sharp crack echoed out.

Scarman hit the ground before he even realized what happened, leg twisted at a horrible angle.

The others tried to rush Anthony, but he took them down with a few quick, brutal

moves, leaving them sed
and groaning on the pavement

Anthony took a drag from his cigarette, then held it between his fingers as he pressed his spotless shoe down on Scarman's hand. He crouched low smoke curling in the air a dangerous smile tugging at his lips.

"What did you just call her?" he asked, voice low and menacing. The sound of it sent a cold shiver down everyone's spine.

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Scarman was sprawled on the ground, sweating and trembling, begging for mercy.

"Sir, it was her... she's the one who came onto us."

"If you like her, just take her. She's yours now."

Came onto them...

Charlotte felt a chill run straight through her, like someone had poured ice water over her head. Her eyes slowly drifted to Anthony.

He didn't say a word, but the look on his face only grew darker. He pressed his shoe even harder into Scarman's hand.

Scarman's face twisted with pain. "Sir, it was me... I was the one trying to mess with her. I'm sorry, I swear I'll never do it again. Please, just let me go."

"Oh? Picking on a kid? That's even worse."

"Yes, yes, I know, I deserve it!" Scarman nodded frantically. "Sir, please, just forgive me-ah!"

Anthony calmly pressed the burning end of his cigarette onto the back of Scarman's hand. His voice was low and icy. "Forgiveness is for God. I'm just here to send you to Him."

Scarman let out a scream. He glanced up and saw a few men walking over, each holding a baseball bat. They dragged him and his buddies into the alley. The sound of their begging faded until it was barely a whisper.

"Anthony." Hans stepped forward, offering him a disinfectant wipe.

Anthony wiped his hands, the coldness in his eyes melting a little as he looked at Charlotte. "We'll clean things up after we leave."

Hans hesitated for a second. Was Anthony worried about scaring the girl? That didn't seem like him. Maybe it was because she'd saved Patricia. That

had to be it.

Anthony tossed the wipe in the trash, then walked over to Charlotte. He gave her a lazy smile. "Are you hurt?"

Charlotte shook her head.

"Come on. I'll drive you home."

She glanced at the empty street, pulled her jacket a little tighter, and obediently headed for the car.

"Front seat."

Charlotte stopped, her hand still on the back door. She looked at Anthony, confusion in her clear eyes.

He bent down and opened the passenger door for her, raising an eyebrow. "What's wrong? I'm not going to eat you."

Charlotte just stared at him. Seriously, he could hold a grudge.

Once she was in, Anthony walked around and got in on the driver's side.

Charlotte sat quietly, her face pale, looking like she'd been scared out of her with Anthony couldn't help but smile a little. He leaned over toward her.

The sudden closeness and his unfamiliar scent made Charlotte tense up. She instinctively shrank away, her bright eyes full of caution.

He fastened her seatbelt with a soft click.

Charlotte blinked, speechless.

Anthony shot her a sidelong look and smirked before turning back to the wheel and starting the car.

They drove down the road, the soft scent in the car making everything feel calm and almost dreamy.

"This isn't a good place for someone

like you," Anthony said quietly, glancing at her neat clothes and the backpack in her arms, "Don't come here again

Charlotte didn't reply. She just kept looking at him, her eyes glimmering.

He noticed. This girl was always staring. He lowered his head, his dark eyes meeting hers. His voice was relaxed, with a hint of a smile. "What are you looking at? Am I really that good-looking?" '

Charlotte turned away to stare out the window, playing the perfect ice

princess.

Anthony had seen this cold side of her before. He didn't mind. He figured she was still scared from what happened earlier.

He looked at her for a moment, then suddenly pulled over to the side of the road.

"Wait here." He got out and crossed the street to a 24-hour convenience store. Charlotte watched him go, her lashes trembling.

A minute later, Anthony came back and handed her a carton of milk.

"I asked the clerk. This is what all the kids drink."

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He spoke with a teasing smile, his deep voice smooth and full of flirtation.

Charlotte took the milk, her cool expression softening just a little. "Thank you."

Anthony watched as she unwrapped the straw and took tiny sips, the amusement in his eyes growing.

She really was just a kid.

"So, where do you live? I'll take you home."

Charlotte paused, digging through her bag. Her brows knitted in frustration.

Her rope was missing. She must have dropped it during the fight.

Now, she'd have to use the front door.

She went quiet, lips pressed together. "Could you take me to a hotel instead?"

Anthony noticed her hesitation, his usually cold gaze warming with interest.

"You sneaked out, didn't you? Afraid to go back?"

Charlotte's long lashes dropped as she looked down, quietly drinking her milk.

"Hotels aren't safe. Just stay at my place tonight."

"Alright."

He blinked, a little surprised. The tip of his tongue pressed against his cheek.

"You're pretty bold. Aren't you worried I might be a bad guy?"

Charlotte met his eyes, her voice steady and innocent. "That's okay. I'm not a good kid either."

Anthony couldn't help but laugh. She was interesting.

Half an hour later, the Bugatti glided to a stop in front of a luxurious villa.

Charlotte stood at the gate, slowly taking in the peaceful courtyard and the

clean, elegant lines of the house.

It wasn't the place she'd been to last time.

"This is my private place," Anthony said, standing beside her, his gaze gentle as he watched her.

A middle-aged woman heard them arrive and hurried out, bowing politely.

"Anthony, you're home. And this is...?"

Anthony knew she recognized him, but he couldn't resist teasing. He bent down, his handsome face close to Charlotte's and spoke in a low, playful voice "What's your name, little one?"

Charlotte could tell he was doing it on purpose, treating her like a kid.

"Charlotte Main."

"Charlotte Main..." Anthony repeated her name, tasting the sound, his lips curling into a mysterious smile. "Helen, please show Ms. Main to a guest room."

Helen glanced at Charlotte and couldn't help but look her up and down. The girl was tall and slender, fair-skinned, with a delicate beauty like a porcelain doll. Clearly no ordinary

She just seemed... very young.

Anthony had never brought any woman home before. The first time, it was a girl like this.

"Yes, sir." After more than twenty years working for Anthony, Helen knew when to keep quiet.

"Ms. Main, please come with me."

Charlotte looked back at Anthony. He raised an eyebrow, their eyes meeting for a moment. His gaze softened, as if something about her felt strangely familiar, though he couldn't figure out why.

"If you need anything, just let Helen know," Anthony said, loosening his tie. His voice

was unexpectedly gentle.

Helen's eyes widened a bit. Anthony was never like this with anyone.

"Okay," Charlotte replied softly, then followed Helen upstairs.

The villa was mostly black and white, with hardly any decorations. The emptiness made it feel even colder.

"Ms. Main, this is your room," Helen said, opening a door and stepping aside with a warm smile. "The bathroom has brand-new toiletries. If you need anything, just ask me."

Charlotte looked at Helen, a trace of warmth flickering in her eyes. Her grandmother used to care for her just like this, with the same careful smile.

"Thank you, Helen."

"You're very welcome." Helen's smile grew, clearly pleased with how polite Charlotte

was.

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Charlotte dropped her bag onto the bed and sat down, glancing around the room. The guest room was spotless, the air crisp, not a single hint that anyone had stayed here before.

She frowned a little, picked up her pajamas, and headed into the bathroom. After her shower, she automatically reached into her backpack for her white pill bottle.

Empty.

She shook it, hoping, but there was nothing left. Without her herbs, she couldn't make more. Her frown deepened as she stared at the closed door, a flicker of worry in her eyes. She hesitated, then stepped barefoot onto the plush carpet.

Dragging the small table, she wedged it in front of the door. It didn't seem secure enough, so she stacked a few chairs on top just to be sure. She studied her makeshift barricade, satisfied only when it looked impossible to open from the inside. Finally, she climbed back into bed, pulled the covers up, and let her eyes drift shut.

Meanwhile, in the study on the other side of the house, Anthony was up late finishing work. After his shower, he came out with just a towel slung low around his waist, showing off his toned chest. His short, dark hair was still damp, drops of water sliding down his defined abs, disappearing under the towel.

He sat down, phone in one hand, cigarette in the other.

"I never want to see those idiots in Cabinda again," he said into the phone. He paused, flicking some ash away, his tone casual. "Break the leader's hands."

"Yes, sir." Hans sounded respectful, as always. "Anthony, you should get some sleep."

"Yeah."

Anthony ended the call and was just reaching for a towel to dry his hair when a loud crash sounded from outside his window.

Helen's panicked voice followed right after.

"Ms. Main!"

Charlotte?

Anthony shot to his feet, strode out onto the balcony, and looked down. There was Charlotte, dressed in a plain white nightgown, standing barefoot on the grass. Her long black hair whipped around her face in the wind, her head down so he couldn't see her expression.

"Ms. Main, are you okay?" Helen yelled, pressing a hand to her chest as she looked up. Did Charlotte just fall from the third floor?

And she'd landed right in the yard where 98K stayed.

98K was the Alaskan Malamute

Anthony had rescued years ago. He

was huge now, all muscle and

attitude, aggressive and

unpredictable No one except

Anthony dared get close

Charlotte was a stranger, and she'd dropped straight into the dog's territory. If 98K came out, he'd tear her apart.

A sharp growl split the quiet night. The enormous black-and-white Malamute padded out of his doghouse, mouth open, eyeing Charlotte.

The maids nearby gasped and backed away, some covering their mouths.

"Ms. Main, don't move! Please, don't move!" Helen begged, but Charlotte either didn't hear her or didn't care. She walked forward, totally calm.

"Ms. Main!" Helen's voice shook with fear.

A deep snarl came from 98K, and then he lunged, launching himself right at Charlotte.

Screams broke out from the maids, hands flying to their faces. This was it. 98K was going to attack.

But before anyone could process what was happening, a dark blur streaked across the yard and Anthony's voice cut through the chaos, cold and sharp.

"98K, back off!"

Instead of a violent scene, everyone saw something completely unexpected: The massive dog was wrapped up in Charlotte's arms, her hands locked around his neck. His big head was squished, eyes wide, and for a second he looked almost silly.

"Woo..." 98K's giant paws landed on her shoulders, his tail wagging so hard his whole body wiggled. He licked her cheek clearly thrilled not dangerous at all.

The maids just stared, completely stunned.

Helen rubbed her eyes, sure she must be seeing things.

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98K hadn't hurt Ms. Main.

It was almost unbelievable.

Anthony stood there, completely stunned, just staring at the girl and the dog, his face a mix of shock and confusion.

Charlotte was lying on top of 98K, her cheek nuzzling into the dog's soft fur. She didn't look scared at all.

"Awoof, awoof..."

98K didn't look scary anymore. With his ears drooping and his tongue hanging out, he seemed more like a silly, oversized puppy than a fierce guard dog.

Anthony's eyes flickered with surprise. He stayed silent for a moment, then finally walked over and crouched down, his gaze landing on Charlotte's face.

Her eyes were open, but totally blank. Her pretty little face didn't show a single emotion.

"Charlotte..."

Anthony called her name, but she didn't react. She just kept hugging 98K, refusing to let go.

"Hey, kid?"

He frowned, realizing something was definitely off. She was spaced out, completely unresponsive.

"Anthony, I think Ms. Main can't hear us. It's like....." Helen's voice was soft

and careful as she noticed it too. "She's sleepwalking."

That had to be it. How else could she have jumped from the third floor?

"I heard you should never wake a sleepwalker," Helen added. "It can be really dangerous."

Sleepwalking?

Anthony's brow furrowed deeper. He didn't say anything else, just gently took Charlotte's slender wrist, trying to guide her back to her room.

As soon as their skin touched, something changed in her eyes. She let go of 98K and slowly turned her head, her empty gaze settling on Anthony.

Her eyes were clear and bright now, but instead of that cold, distant look, there was something softer. A trace of hurt and helplessness.

Anthony felt his heart skip. He couldn't help but reach out and touch her cheek, his expression complicated.

"Did you get hurt when you fell?"

"Woof!"

98K immediately started whining, jumping up and down next to Charlotte, pawing at her for attention.

Anthony's eyes turned sharp. "Quiet."

The dog's tail stopped wagging right

away, and his head drooped as he slumped to the floor. He kept his eyes on Charlotte, giving her a hopeful little wag. fo

The sound seemed to wake Charlotte up a bit. She suddenly twisted her hand and locked her fingers with Anthony's, holding on tight.

Her palm felt cool and her fingers were so slender and soft, as if they might break if he squeezed too hard.

Anthony looked down at her. Her eyes were still unfocused, but now she was staring right at him. There was something unreadable in her expression.

Before he could react, Charlotte took a small step forward and melted into his arms, wrapping her arms around his waist and pressing her cheek against his chest. fo

Her scent was fresh and clean, filling Anthony's senses.

He tensed up, his breath coming faster.

Everyone watching was stunned. This girl actually went and hugged Anthony?

Didn't she know he never let women get close? The last woman who tried to approach him still hadn't been seen since.

"Lottie....." Charlotte mumbled softly, barely awake.

"What?"

Anthony wasn't sure if she was conscious or not. He gently tilted her chin up, trying

to get her to look at him.

"Lottie..."

She repeated the name, then closed her eyes, resting her forehead against his chest as she drifted off to sleep.

Lottie? Was that her nickname?

Anthony's lips tugged into a small smile. He looked at her with a softness he rarely showed, then leaned down and lifted her into his arms.

Charlotte instinctively clung to his neck. Her warm breath brushed across his chest, sending a gentle, tingling shiver through him.