

The Mocked Miss's Hidden Crowns – Chapter 31

"You two, help out. The client wants it cut into 404 pieces."

"Uh... okay, sure."

The sales associate had worked here for years, but she'd never seen anything like this. She hurried to grab a pair of scissors.

The sound of metal slicing through fabric rang out in the store, every snip echoing in the silence. Each cut felt like a slap to Olivia's face.

Without the dress, what was she supposed to wear for the competition?

Staring at the scattered scraps on the floor, Olivia covered her mouth and ran out, tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Olivia!"

Charlotte watched as Olivia and her mother left one after the other. She stood up slowly, rubbing the back of her neck.

"Put it on the Main Family's account."

At the door, Charlotte glanced at the sales associate, her lips twitching with the hint of a smile. She didn't say a word and just walked out.

Not even thirty seconds later, the manager got a message from headquarters. The sales associate was fired on the spot.

"Why?" The associate just stood there, stunned.

"You really have to ask?" The manager tossed her a tablet. The screen showed security footage sent from headquarters—her being rude and insulting to a customer.

"You're just a salesgirl, but you act like you own the place. Always looking down on everyone," the manager snapped. "Corporate gave the order. Pack up and leave." Everything went black for the sales associate. She slid to the floor, powerless.

Charlotte left 1-KISS and caught a cab back to the Main Family home.

She walked into the foyer and heard chaos coming from inside.

Olivia was throwing a fit, still fuming from the humiliation. The whole family was gathered, trying to calm her down.

Steven had rushed home from work as soon as he heard the news.

"Olivia, don't worry. I'll find you an even prettier dress. You'll look amazing at the competition."

"It's just a dress. If you want another one, I'll buy it for you," Steven added. Olivia bit back a smile, still sniffing. "But it was so expensive. I don't want you to spend so much on me, Dad."

If she'd known things would turn out like this, she would have called her dad right away.

Steven looked at Olivia, his heart softening at how considerate she seemed. "Charlotte, you're home."

Hearing his voice, Charlotte strolled in. Steven's eyes landed on the line

shopping bag in her hand, and his face instantly turned cold.

"Olivia's devastated she didn't get her dress, and it's like you don't even care." Care? She definitely did.

Charlotte blinked, then held up her bag with a little smile, her eyes sparkling. "But got mine

be happy about that?" "That?" Content- .net>

Steven looked like he was about to explode.

Olivia and Elizabeth both glared at her, fuming.

Was she clueless? Did she really not get it?

"If there's nothing else, I'm going to my room. Charlotte dropped her smile, her eyes sweeping over everyone before stopping on Olivia's tearstreaked face. Go ahead keep crying. Might as well while you're at it." swñovels

Olivia could only stare at her, speechless.

"Charlotte!"

Steven's angry shout followed her, but Charlotte ignored him and headed upstairs.

She tossed her bag onto the floor and flopped onto her bed, arms spread wide.

Pulling out her tablet, she opened her art app and tapped her latest project. She was almost done with a beautiful evening gown design.

Holding her stylus, she added a few quick strokes.

A few minutes later, she saved her work.

She opened her email and sent the design out.

Sender: Tracing.

The founder and chief designer of 1-KISS.

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That night, after taking her meds, Charlotte sat up in bed, scrolling through apartment listings on her phone.

The villa was way too big for one person.

But all the places she liked were too far from school.

As she agonized over it, her phone buzzed.

A friend request on social media.

Charlotte tapped it open. The profile picture was just the name "Blair" in big, bold

letters.

She knew exactly who it was the second she saw it.

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Charlotte pressed her lips together, her long lashes fluttering as she stared at her phone, her face giving nothing away. She hit Decline without a second thought, tossed her phone aside, and slipped under the covers. Sleep came easily.

At the same time, in a quiet private room, Anthony sprawled across a leather sofa, his shirt unbuttoned just enough to show off a strong, pale collarbone. He held his phone loosely, having just hit Send Friend Request. Seconds dragged by. The reply popped up: Request Declined.

So that was that. He'd just been turned down. Kenneth, lounging beside him, saw the whole thing. Kenneth came from the Gates family. Broad shoulders, narrow hips, a face that graced billboards and magazine covers he was the hottest star around. "Wow, someone in Cabinda actually had the guts to reject Anthony Blair's friend request?" Kenneth grinned.

Anthony just smirked, set his phone down, and lifted his glass for a toast. "Cheers." "Is Patricia on your case again about getting married? You just picking whoever you can to shut her up, or are you actually into this one?"

"Who is she, anyway? Celebrity? Heiress?"

Anthony's voice was low and a little rough. "Just a girl."

Kenneth almost spat out his drink. "A girl? Anthony, come on. That's a little much, even for you."

"She's legal," Anthony shot back, a laugh in his voice. He thought about Charlotte, how icy she'd been, and couldn't help the smile tugging at his lips.

"Legal or not, still feels like you're robbing the cradle." Kenneth kicked his feet up on the table, took a long drink, and gave Anthony a sly look. "Patricia's gonna lose it if she finds out. She'll snap your legs like twigs."

"You could wait, you know. Maybe my dad will finally track down my aunt's daughter, and then you'll have a perfect match. Family to family, all neat and tidy."

Anthony's smile turned sly. "Think she could be prettier than my girl?"

Kenneth cursed under his breath. His aunt had been gorgeous. No way her daughter could be anything but stunning. Too bad she was still missing after all these years.

Charlotte woke up early, pulling on a crisp white shirt and a pair of dark blue jeans that showed off her long straight legs. ha White sneakers smooth and shiny, bangs soft against her forehead, her small face bright and delicate. She didn't put any effort into it, but just standing in the living room, she drew every eye.

Olivia came downstairs at that moment, heels clicking on the spiral staircase. Side

by side, the difference between them was glaring.

"Charlotte is so pretty."

"Her figure is perfect."

"She just has that classy vibe."

"I always thought Olivia was beautiful, but next to Charlotte..."

Olivia wore her blue and white school uniform, the skirt shorter than usual to make her legs look longer. She had a decent shape, but compared to Charlotte, her legs seemed thicker, her hips wider, Skin dull. She caught sight of Charlotte and, for a second, couldn't hide the jealousy in her eyes.

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She snapped, "Why aren't you wearing the Pathfinder Academy uniform?"

Today was the start of school, and her dad had already sorted out the details. With Charlotte's grades only Pathfinder would take her, and even then, it had taken a lot of favors to get her in.

Charlotte glanced at her, didn't bother to answer, and headed for the door.

Olivia stomped after her, voice rising. "Charlotte, are you ignoring me on purpose?"

Charlotte shot back with a cold laugh, "Oh, that was you? I thought I heard a dog barking."

Furious, Olivia bit her lip, grabbed her school bag, and hurled it at Charlotte.

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Just as the bag was about to hit her, Charlotte stepped aside with easy grace. Olivia's swing missed completely and she stumbled forward, nearly losing her balance.

"You dare dodge me?"

The bag hit the floor with a thud. Furious, Olivia raised her hand, aiming a slap right at Charlotte's face.

Charlotte had always been the one to stand there and take it, never fighting back, just quietly enduring whatever Olivia threw her way.

But not today. Charlotte's eyes narrowed. She caught Olivia's wrist and, without thinking, twisted her arm and slapped her right back.

The smack rang out. Olivia's head snapped to the side and she crashed to the floor.

"Olivia!"

Susan burst out of the house just in time to see Olivia hit the ground. She rushed over and helped her up.

Ever since Elizabeth brought Olivia home at age three, she'd been the family's darling. Spoiled, protected, never scolded, let alone hit.

To be slapped by Charlotte, and in front of everyone...

"Charlotte, what do you think you're doing?"

Susan dusted off Olivia's clothes, then pointed straight at Charlotte, her face red with fury. "Looks like Steven was right about you. A few years in the countryside and you've turned wild. No manners at all."

"You're going to apologize to Olivia right now. And then let her hit you back."

As soon as Susan said that, the other servants looked at Charlotte with pity. Susan had always been powerful in this house, right behind Steven, Elizabeth, and Olivia. She'd bullied Charlotte for years.

Now Charlotte had gotten on her bad side again. Who knew what would happen next?

Charlotte didn't move. Her eyes glittered coldly, full of challenge.

Susan took a step closer, her finger almost poking Charlotte's face. Her voice got louder. "Are you deaf? I told you-"

Before she could finish, Charlotte grabbed her finger.

Everyone stared in shock as Charlotte kicked Susan hard in the knee.

There was a sickening crack as Susan's knee buckled and she dropped to the ground in from net

Charlotte. Her scream of pain filled the hallway.

For someone Susan's age, a fall like that could be serious.

The other maids froze, their faces pale. Olivia tried to step forward but stopped when Charlotte looked her way That look was icy cold, so chilling that Olivia backed away without a word.

Charlotte...

Is she having another episode? How did she change this much?

Charlotte leaned down, a cold, unsettling smile on her lips. "Since when does a servant get to teach the master the rules?"

She squeezed Susan's finger, making her wince in pain.

Sweat was pouring down Susan's face. She hated Charlotte, but right now, she could only give in. "No, ... I wouldn't dare. I was wrong. shouldn't have spoken to you like that."

Charlotte looked down at her, eyes sharp and unfeeling. "Here's my rule. Anyone

who forgets it will end up just like this."

The warning couldn't have been more clear.

The maids and guards exchanged nervous looks before lowering their heads.

"I understand," Susan stammered, nodding quickly.

Charlotte let go of her hand, then calmly pulled a disinfectant wipe from her bag and cleaned her hands, slow and unbothered.

Her face was totally calm, almost serene, but that only made her scarier.

Was this really the same scared, simple Charlotte from before?

She was different now. Completely different.

When she finished cleaning up, Charlotte tossed the wipe in the trash, then slid into

the car.

"If Steven and his family want to settle this, tell them to wait until I get back tonight."

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"Drive."

The driver had seen just how fierce Charlotte could be, so there was no way he was going to argue with her. He started the car right away, tires spinning as they sped off and left a cloud of dust behind.

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Vanguard High School.

This was the most prestigious high school in Cabinda, maybe even in the whole country. Every year, one hundred percent of its students got into top universities.

To get into Vanguard, you either had to be seriously talented or come from a family with money or power. For most people, getting accepted was nothing more than a dream.

The car rolled to a stop.

Charlotte stepped out, tossed her bag over her shoulder, and headed straight for the main entrance.

The driver stared after her, completely stunned, and hurried to call out, "Charlotte, Mr. Main set you up to attend Pathfinder Academy..."

She'd asked him to switch routes partway through the drive, but he never imagined she was taking him here, of all places. Vanguard High School? She was just a girl from a rural school who hadn't even finished her senior year. How could she possibly have the right to walk through those doors?

Charlotte just gave him a quick, easy smile, skipped any explanation, and walked up to the gate. She exchanged a few words with the security guard, and just like that, he waved her inside.

The driver could only stare, totally confused.

Once she was inside, Charlotte asked for directions to the principal's office. She slung her bag over her shoulder and made her way through the crowded halls.

It was the busiest time of day, and students were everywhere. Since she hadn't received her uniform yet, her looks and her different style of dress made her stand out, especially among all those students in matching uniforms.

"Who is that? What class is she from? She's gorgeous."

"I've never seen her before. Maybe she's new."

"Is she really one of us? She's so pretty! Let's go see where she's going!"

"Aren't we supposed to watch the basketball game?"

A boy smacked his friend on the back of the head. "Are you out of your mind? This

is way more interesting than some basketball game."

By then, Charlotte had already found the principal's office.

"Come in."

When she heard the voice, Charlotte opened the door and stepped inside.

The principal didn't even look up from his paperwork. "What do you need?" His voice was cool and sharp.

"Good morning, sir. I'm Charlotte. Mr. Lane recommended me."

At the mention of Mr. Lane, the principal's head shot up. When he saw the girl in front of him, he frowned, clearly surprised. Was this really the all-round genius Mr. Lane had talked up so much? He heard she was especially talented in science.

How many people in the world could get called a science prodigy by Mr. Lane? As far as he knew, only Dr. Cole, his idol and a legend in physics, had ever gotten that kind of praise.

"Mr. Lane said he called you and told me to come straight here."

"Yes, yes, of course." The principal's expression changed instantly, breaking into a broad smile. "Mr. Lane had nothing but good things to say about you. I trust his judgment completely."

If this girl ever made a name for herself, it would be great for Vanguard High.

Charlotte just smiled a little, not saying much.

She'd never met anyone as stubborn as Mr. Lane. He'd gone all out, begging and pleading for her to attend school, saying the country would be missing out if she didn't. He even promised that once she graduated college, he introduce her to his own mentor, Dr. Cole.

Charlotte thought to herself, "Like I need him to introduce me."

The principal couldn't hide his excitement. After thinking for a moment, he picked up the phone and called for the homeroom teacher from Class A.

Class A was the top senior class at Vanguard. The students there were the best of

the best, the future leaders everyone talked about.

But when Ronald Lee, Class A's homeroom teacher, took one look at Charlotte's file, his face dropped.

Lamplighter College? A kid from some tiny, out-of-the-way place was already a stretch. Getting into Vanguard at all was almost impossible, but Class A? No way. Pulling strings wasn't going to work on him.

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"No way."

Ronald Lee set the file back down, his tone cold and final.

He was in his forties, with a shiny bald head that had earned him the nickname "Bald Lee" around Vanguard High. He'd taught here for years and had a reputation for churning out star students. Even the principal had to give him some respect.

"Class A isn't a dumping ground. We don't take just anyone," Ronald said, shooting Charlotte a look full of disdain.

He thought she was just another nobody from a third-rate school. Completely unimpressive. What kind of strings did she pull to get the principal to let her into Vanguard?

"Ronald, this student really has potential..." the principal tried to persuade him.

"Class A doesn't need more good students. We're full of them," Bald Lee interrupted, not bothering to hide his contempt. A kid from the countryside-how special could she really be?

"If you insist on putting her in Class A, you'll have to find a new homeroom teacher."

With that, Ronald walked out, not looking back.

The principal's face went pale with frustration, but there was nothing he could do. Switching homeroom teachers now would only stir up trouble with the students and their parents. It'd be a mess.

"Charlotte, honestly, every class at our school is great. They're all full of talented students. Maybe you could consider another class?" the principal asked, trying to sound cheerful.

Charlotte lifted her lashes, her voice quiet. "Class C is fine."

"Great, great. Let me call someone to take you there," the principal said, reaching for the phone.

"I can find it," Charlotte replied.

She'd already seen it when she came in.

She gave a little bow and slipped out the door.

As soon as she left, the principal picked up the phone to call Mr. Lane.

"Eric, the student you recommended just checked in today."

"Really?" Mr. Lane's voice shot up with excitement. "She grew up in the countryside, you know. She's gentle, a bit naïve, and tends to get pushed around. Please look after her."

"She's in good hands, don't worry."

"By the way, how's your latest research going?"

"Almost done, almost done."

Mr. Lane pushed his glasses up his nose, hung up, and immediately texted Charlotte.

Mr. Lane: [Sweetheart, do you have time to come by? Grandpa's stuck on his research again. Come help me out, okay?]

Charlotte: [No.]

Mr. Lane: [Sweetheart, you haven't visited in forever. I'm old, who
how

ow many days I have left? What if I drop dead before see you again?

Charlotte: [...]

Mr. Lane: [So you don't love Grandpa anymore, after all I've done for you. don't
care, I'm not listening you have
to come see me

If you don
don'tà if you
don't, I'll...]

Charlotte: [...I'll come tonight.]

Mr. Lane: [I'll be waiting at home. Hehe.]

Charlotte rubbed her temples, fighting the urge to reach through the screen
and

throttle her overly dramatic grandpa.

She turned off her phone and tossed it in her bag.

Just as she started down the hallway, she heard quiet sobbing from a patch
of bushes nearby.

Charlotte looked over.

A small girl sat huddled on the
ground, hair tangled and wet, her school uniform streaked with dirt,
schooluniform

She looked like he se
been through
been
hell.

Looking at her, Charlotte got this weird, distant feeling-like she was looking at
a younger version of herself.

Her gaze softened, and she walked over automatically.

"Do you need some help?"

The girl jerked up, startled.

Her tiny face was scribbled over with red and green pen, and fat tears kept
rolling down her cheeks.

She looked shocked that anyone would come near her. Her wide, watery eyes
locked onto Charlotte.

"Are you hurt?" Charlotte asked, frowning as she crouched down and gently
reached out.

"I... I..." The girl scooted away, stammering. "I'm dirty. I'll... I'll get your clothes
dirty."