

The Mocked Miss's Hidden Crowns – Chapter 36

A stutterer.

Charlotte glanced at her crisp white shirt and gave a small, crooked smile.

"Come on, get up."

"Oh, th-thank you." The girl scrambled to her feet, stealing shy, curious glances at Charlotte.

She's so gentle... and so pretty. Honestly, she's the most beautiful girl I've seen at Vanguard.

Charlotte eyed her up and down. Dirt streaked the girl's cheeks, and there were scrapes on her legs. No doubt about it, she'd been bullied.

"I'll take you to the school nurse first. After that, I'll call the police."

"N-no." The girl grabbed Charlotte's hand, shaking her head hard. "I'm fine, really. You... you should go. Don't let anyone see you with me. I... I don't want to get you in trouble."

"Why not?"

"I... I just don't want to drag you into this." She wiped her tears away and forced out a big, shaky smile. "Thank you for helping me."

She doesn't want to drag me down? Guess she's already become everyone's target, Charlotte thought.

A hint of sarcasm flickered across Charlotte's eyes. This kind of bullying was everywhere, wasn't it? School might shape some amazing people, but it also turned out its fair share of jerks.

Charlotte didn't argue. Instead, she led the girl toward the bathroom.

"Let's clean you up. I'll help with your cuts."

Just as they stepped inside, a couple of other girls walked in. The moment they spotted the stutterer, they huddled together, whispered something, then scurried off.

No one else came in after that.

It was like the girl was carrying something contagious.

The stutterer peeked nervously toward the door, her watery eyes trembling. She was about to cry again. "They saw you. Now you'll... you'll get in trouble because of me. I'm sorry."

"No, I won't."

Charlotte felt a sharp pang in her chest. She dug two small bottles from her bag and waved the girl over. "Come here," she said, her voice soft.

The girl wiped her eyes and shuffled over obediently. She was tiny, barely reaching Charlotte's chin she

hugged herself tightly, shivering like a scared little kitten.

Charlotte grabbed a tissue, dampened it, and gently wiped the ink marks off the girl's face. Luckily, the marks came off easily.

No one had ever been this gentle with her before. The stutterer's eyes went red, tears threatening to spill over again.

"Hold it in. No crying," Charlotte said quietly.

The girl looked up, startled. Charlotte's cool gaze was enough for her to swallow down her tears.

"Why do they pick on you?" Charlotte asked, finishing up with the tissue and starting to treat the scrapes on her legs.

The girl lowered her head. "Because I.... I st-stutter. They always make me sing, or... or they pick fights with me on purpose."

"If I don't do what they want, they just find new ways to bully me."

Charlotte's eyes grew serious. "Why haven't you told your family or the teachers?"

The girl gave a helpless little smile. "It wouldn't help."

"I can't... can't explain things right, so nobody believes me. My family... we don't have money or connections, and I don't want my grandma to worry."

No money, no one to help her.

would

Charlotte would find out later that the girl's parents were gone, and she lived with her elderly grandma. The only reason she got into Vanguard was because she'd won first place in a national physios competition. They made an exception for her

Her stutter, plus her special admission, probably made her a magnet for jealousy.

"How long has this been happening?" Charlotte asked, meeting her eyes as she finished tending the wounds.

The girl put her hands neatly on her

knees, her big eyes shining.

"Th-three years thought if just stayed out of their way, maybe they'd leave me alone..."

But she'd been wrong.

Things had only gotten worse. Now, they were even threatening to force her out

before graduation.

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"All done."

Charlotte straightened up and handed the girl a small, plain tube of ointment.

"Put this on for three days. You'll be fine."

"Thank you."

The girl took it like it was a precious gem, carefully slipping it into the hidden pocket of her uniform.

When Charlotte picked up her bag and started to leave, the girl's eyes brightened and she quickly hurried after her.

"My name's Shirley Brown. I'm in Class A. If anyone... if anyone bullies you, you have to let me know..."

Class A?

So she was a special admit. No wonder people targeted her.

Charlotte slowed down, a soft smile touching her lips as she glanced at Shirley.

"You're going to watch out for me?"

Shirley's round cheeks turned bright red. She mumbled,

"N-not really. I just... I could tell them not to mess with you."

"And you think they'll listen?"

Shirley's face fell and she shook her head. Her explanations never worked. Still, she couldn't just ignore it if someone picked on her benefactor.

"I'm Charlotte Main. I'm in Class C. If you ever need anything, come find me. I'll look out for you."

Shirley just stood there, frozen, watching Charlotte's cool, calm figure disappear down the hall. Her eyebrows knit together.

She sighed quietly.

She's new here. Too innocent. She has no idea how brutal Vanguard High can be.

...

Class C was up on the second floor.

Charlotte walked down the stairs, her pace laid-back, when a sharp voice pierced the hallway.

"Charlotte, what are you doing here?"

Charlotte looked up. Olivia was planted in front of her, eyes wide with disbelief.

The slap mark on her face was almost totally covered with foundation.

Wasn't Dad having the driver take her to Pathfinder Academy? This was Vanguard High. How did she even get in?

Charlotte barely glanced at her, cold and silent, and kept walking.

"Hey, Charlotte." Olivia chased after

her, blocking her way. "Do you t

think

just because you're a Main you get

special treatment?"

"Vanguard isn't that kind of school. Money and connections won't get you far here."

"Even if you snuck in, with your grades and brains, you won't last."

"You should just leave before you embarrass the Main family. If you make a scene, Dad won't forgive you."

Charlotte stopped. Her eyes, icy and sharp,

grabbed onto Olivia. She grabbed Olivia's hair and yanked

her

into the corner.

Olivia smacked against the wall, pain shooting through her body like her bones were cracking.

It hurt. It really hurt.

"If you say one more word, I'll break your mouth."

Olivia remembered what Charlotte had done to Susan and went quiet, biting her lip, not daring to move.

When she finally managed to get up, she saw the Class C homeroom teacher standing in front of Charlotte.

"You must be Charlotte. The principal called me. I'll take you to get your books and uniform."

"Okay."

They left together.

The principal?

Charlotte got in because of the principal? She'd just come back from the countryside. How could she possibly know someone so important?

Olivia immediately called Steven.

When he heard about Charlotte getting into Vanguard, he was just as stunned as Olivia.

"Dad, if you didn't talk to the principal, then how did Charlotte get in?"

"Don't tell me she... got involved with someone..."

Steven's anger boiled over.

"If she dares to stir up trouble like she did five years ago, I'll kill her."

Olivia bit her lip, fingers clenching tight as a cold, hateful smile crept across her face.

So what if she got in?

There were always ways to get her kicked out of Vanguard High. Out of Cabinda, too.

Charlotte picked up her new books and uniform.

Her homeroom teacher led her into Class C.

At Vanguard High, only Class A was elite. The rest, including Class C, were just regular classes.

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When the homeroom teacher walked in, the classroom was buzzing. The boys were in the middle of a loud debate about the new girl everyone had heard about, arguing over just how pretty she might be.

Then, the door opened wider, and Charlotte stepped in behind the teacher.

Instantly, the whole room seemed to freeze. You could almost hear the collective gasp from the boys.

No way. The new beauty is actually in our class?

The boys all stared, eyes wide and shining, like they'd just won the lottery. Even the girls found themselves staring at Charlotte, unable to look away.

She was tall, slim, with flawless skin and that kind of effortless beauty that made it hard to look anywhere else. Every feature that girls usually envied, she had. Just a minute ago, the girls had been rolling their eyes at the boys, thinking they were being dramatic. Now, seeing Charlotte in person, they had to admit she really was that pretty.

Parrish's eyes nearly popped out of his head. He leaned over to Andrew with a cheeky grin. "Hey, you into her?"

Andrew was slouched against the wall, looking half-asleep, but his eyes were glued to Charlotte. At Parrish's question, he snapped out of it and tried to play it cool. "She's alright. Not bad, I guess."

Charlotte stood perfectly straight. Her face was calm, her big eyes clear and bright. She looked sweet and polite, but there was something about her that warned people not to get too close.

"Hi, everyone. I'm Charlotte," she said, her voice clear and calm.

The homeroom teacher, Eleanor, smiled at her. "Charlotte, the only seat left is at the back. Is that alright?"

Charlotte nodded, not bothered at all. She picked up her things and headed to the empty seat in the last row. She tossed her bag into the desk drawer without a second thought. As she sat down, her gaze drifted to the boy next to her, or more specifically, to the name tag on his shirt.

Andrew Blair.

Charlotte raised her eyebrows, her eyes lingering on him a little longer than she meant to.

Parrish nudged Andrew again, whispering, "See? Even the new girl can't resist you."

Andrew was kind of a big deal around here. He had that bad boy reputation, a powerful family, and a face that made girls swoon. He scoffed, adjusting his

collar like he didn't care. "You really think I'm that easy? Doesn't matter if she makes the first move. I only care if I'm interested."

He tried to act like he wasn't bothered, but a second later, he couldn't help sneaking another look at Charlotte.

After the last class ended, Charlotte was already on the move, phone pressed to her ear as she walked out. "The bike's parked next to Vanguard. The keys are on it, she said quietly.

"Okay, got it."

She hung up and was about to keep walking when a hand suddenly blocked her path. Charlotte looked up, a little surprised.

Parrish was standing in front of her, grinning. Behind him, Andrew lounged in his chair, chewing gum and watching her with a lazy smirk.

"Hey, new girl," Andrew called out. "I'm free today. Want a tour of the school?"

Charlotte's expression didn't change. "No thanks," she said, her tone cool as ice. Parrish burst out laughing. "Did you just get rejected, Andrew?"

It was rare for Andrew to actually make the first move, and he'd just been shot down without a second thought.

"If people find out about this, your reputation's toast, man."

Andrew's smile faltered. He got up and stepped closer to Charlotte. "What, playing hard to get?" he said, drawing out each word.

Before he could finish, Charlotte brushed past him, her face unreadable, not bothering to look back. She was gone.

Andrew stood there, speechless.

Parrish couldn't hold in his laughter. "Looks like you got ahead of yourself, Andrew."

Andrew glared at him and aimed a halfhearted kick his way. "She's just playing hard to get. Trust me, she'll come running to me before the week's over."

Parrish just nodded, trying not to laugh again.

Rumor had it Charlotte had helped the shy kid from Class A earlier, which basically meant she'd already pissed off the bullies in that class. Once they started messing with her, she'd have no choice but to come looking for Andrew for help. Or at least, that's what he told himself.

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Charlotte stepped out of the school gates, following Adonis's directions to the parking garage nearby.

Tucked away in the most hidden corner was a brand new, fire-engine red Ecosse ES1 Spirit. It was a heavyweight beast, famous for being one of the top ten priciest motorcycles in the world. The price was jaw-dropping, well over three million dollars. Built with F1 racing technology and materials, it could hit 236 miles per hour. Even seasoned racers found it hard to handle. For women, the number who could master it was close to zero.

Charlotte grinned, clearly satisfied. She slipped on her helmet, swung her leg over the bike, and leaned forward just a little. The engine roared to life, echoing through the garage. In a blink, she shot out, leaving behind only the flash of that red bodywork and a glimpse of long, slender legs. Heads turned. That was straight-up cool.

The bike hit the highway, picking up speed as she weaved through traffic. Soon she reached the city center, slowing only when she hit a red light. She balanced the bike easily, one long leg resting on the pavement. She flipped up her visor, dug a carton of milk from her bag, and bit down on the straw, taking a casual sip.

Right then, a dark Bugatti rolled up beside her. In the back, a man in a perfectly pressed suit leaned against the headrest, his sharp features softened by a laid-back, almost lazy vibe. Everything about him radiated quiet power and icy elegance.

"Anthony, I think that's Ms. Main," Hans said from the front.

The man's eyes opened, sharp and clear, and he glanced out the window. There was Charlotte, owning that powerful bike without breaking a sweat. One hand on the handlebars, pale wrist exposed. The other held her milk, lips wrapped around the straw, eyes drifting as if she didn't have a care in the world. A breeze teased out soft, black hair from under her helmet, adding to the effortlessly cool energy she gave off.

"Wasn't Ms. Main raised in the countryside? How does she even know how to ride something like that?" Hans couldn't help but mutter. He knew the ES1 Spirit. Even pros had trouble with it, and Charlotte looked as delicate as they came.

Anthony studied her face, a faint, amused smile tugging at his lips. She never failed to surprise him.

He lowered the window, just about to call her name, but the light flipped green. Charlotte tucked her legs back up, gunned the engine, and shot off with a burst of confidence.

"Keep up with her," Anthony said quietly.

"Yes, Anthony," Hans replied, stepping on the gas.

They tried. For two blocks, they kept her in sight, but she was gone before they knew it. Hans was left blinking, half embarrassed, half impressed.

"She's too fast, Anthony. I couldn't catch up. He'd tried to match her speed, but she just kept going, reckless and wild. Hans liked his life too much to chase her any harder.

Anthony's eyes narrowed in mild exasperation, but he just smiled and said, "Let's head back to The Blair Estate." He knew where she lived, after all. It wasn't like someone could just whisk her away

Fifteen minutes later, Charlotte pulled up in front of a quiet laboratory. She swung off

the bike, tossing her helmet to the security guard by the door.

"Ms. Main, you're here. Eric's waiting for you inside."

"Thanks." Charlotte slung her bag over her shoulder and walked in.

"Sweetheart, you made it!" An elderly man with snowy hair, wearing an apron and

still clutching a spatula, hurried out to greet her.

"It's been ages. Let me have a good look at you." Mr. Lane grabbed her hands, giving her a once-over like he was checking for missing pieces.

"You've lost weight," he said, frowning. His gaze flicked toward the door, and his voice rose in irritation. Was it that useless father of yours? Has he been giving you a hard time again?"

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"If he tries anything with you, I'll go over there myself and set him straight."

"Or you could just move out. I'll take care of you. I'll pay for your studies..." Charlotte's eyes fluttered and a gentle smile tugged at her lips.

He was dreaming a little too far ahead.

Mr. Lane met Charlotte back when he was doing research in Lamplighter Village. A lot of his breakthroughs in physics were thanks to her. He always

thought she was gifted and tried more than once to bring her to the city for school, but she always turned him down. Now that he heard she was back in Cabinda, he wasted no time inviting her over.

"I'm fine," Charlotte said, her lips curving into a soft smile. She glanced at the spatula in Mr. Lane's hand. "Are you cooking?"

"Oh. Yes, right!" Mr. Lane was well past seventy and his memory wasn't what it used to be.

"Come on, sweetheart, let's eat first."

Charlotte let him guide her to the dining table. Every dish on the table was something she loved, the same recipes her grandma used to make for her. She hadn't expected Mr. Lane to remember.

"Eat up, sweetheart."

Mr. Lane watched her with concern, constantly piling more food into her bowl. It was the happiest meal Charlotte had eaten since coming back to Cabinda.

After dinner, Charlotte shrugged on her radiation-proof jacket and sunglasses, then followed Mr. Lane into the lab. His research on electrical currents had hit a critical stage, and now he was stuck.

Charlotte flipped through the research notes and studied the reaction in the experiment. After a quiet moment, she asked, "Is the data wrong?"

Mr. Lane leaned closer, pushing up his reading glasses.

"Change this to ten."

Charlotte was sure now. The analysis was off.

"Ten? Isn't that a bit much?" Mr. Lane hesitated, but in the end he trusted her judgment and made the change.

A single beep sounded.

The experiment worked.

"How did you know it was ten?" Mr. Lane was beaming, grinning at her with pride. He'd spent two weeks on those numbers and Charlotte had spotted the mistake in seconds. She really was the genius he always said she was.

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"I just guessed."

Charlotte's eyes sparkled with a smile as she looked at him. "It doesn't matter how you get there, as long as the result is right."

"You're incredible." Mr. Lane squeezed her cheek, his affection almost overflowing. "When you get into university, I'll do everything I can to introduce you to Dr. Cole."

Dr. Cole was a giant in the world of physics. Having her as a mentor would open any door.

Charlotte pressed her lips together, her interest piqued. "Sure, that sounds great."

By the time Charlotte got back to the main house, it was already eight

The villa doors were wide open, lights blazing from every room.

Steven Elizabeth, and Olivia sat stiffly on the couch.

Charlotte strolled through the foyer, ignoring them completely, and headed for the stairs.

"Stop right there."

Steven shot to his feet and glared at her, practically vibrating with anger.

"Olivia"

face is bruised and Susan's

still in the hospital. You come home this late and have nothing to say?"

After a full day of classes and two hours in the lab, Charlotte was beyond exhausted.

"Let me know if they die."

The entire living room went silent. People actually gasped. Was Charlotte always this wild?

"Charlotte, I've been far too easy on you!"

Steven's face turned a deep shade of red as he raised his hand, ready to slap her. He was sure that tonight, he'd finally teach this ungrateful girl a lesson.