

The Mocked Miss's Hidden Crowns – Chapter 46 |

Olivia had been the star of Vanguard High from the moment she walked through those doors. She was gorgeous, talented, and everyone seemed to love her— teachers, classmates, you name it.

But right then, a voice rang out from the crowd. "Charlotte!"

All at once, heads turned. People had seen Charlotte's picture on the school forum before. Even though it was just a blurry outline, it had been enough to cause a stir. Now, here she was, standing less than fifteen feet away.

Sunlight spilled through the thick branches, casting Charlotte in a soft, golden glow. Her uniform fit perfectly, showing off her tall, slender figure. The breeze picked up her long hair, and even though she wasn't wearing a stitch of makeup, her skin practically glowed under the sunlight. She was stunning so beautiful it was hard to

look away.

Someone couldn't help but whisper, "She's so pretty."

"Seriously, what does she eat to get skin like that? And those legs, are they real?"

"I didn't think people like her existed outside of magazines."

As soon as one person spoke up, everyone else started gossiping, totally forgetting that their own school beauty queen, Olivia, was right there with them.

"She might be pretty, but if that's all she's got, she's just a pretty face," someone suddenly scoffed.

Nancy stepped up and looped her arm through Olivia's, shooting Charlotte a look full of envy and spite. "She's nothing like Olivia. Olivia's got the looks and the talent."

Olivia gave a tiny frown, her voice soft and gentle. "Don't say that. Everyone here is amazing in their own way."

"Olivia, you're just too nice. Not everyone can win a national piano competition and become Laura's student..."

At the mention of this, the group looked at Olivia with open admiration.

"That's right. Olivia is so humble. That's why she's so successful."

"You're incredible. I'm sure Laura will want you as her student the moment she hears you play."

Olivia's cheeks flushed, her shyness only making her more charming. "It's not a sure thing. There are a lot of talented people out there. I still have so much to learn."

Charlotte was just about to rate Olivia's performance as Oscar-worthy when her phone buzzed. She glanced down and opened her social media.

Blair: "Hey kid, are you done with class?"

Charlotte's long lashes fluttered. She pressed her lips together, ignored the chatter around her, and headed straight for the exit.

Seeing Charlotte walk away without saying anything, Nancy smirked. She's not so tough after all, Nancy thought. All bark, no bite.

"Olivia, don't worry. We've got your back. She wouldn't dare mess with you while we're around."

That set off a new round of curiosity. "Olivia, is it true? Is she really your dad's daughter from another woman?"

Olivia bit her lip, looking like she wanted to say something but couldn't find the words. "No matter what, we're still sisters."

Everyone's eyes lit up. That had to be the truth.

"Your mom's okay with it? I heard she's been mean to you about it!"

Olivia gave a little sigh, her smile tinged with resignation. "Please, let's not talk about it anymore. I'll try to get along with her from now on."

Her helpless smile made her look even more like the sweet, long-suffering victim, always turning the other cheek no matter how unfairly she was treated. No one asked more questions. They'd already decided Charlotte was the villain who'd ruined Olivia's family.

"Kind people always get picked on Nancy added, stirring the pot. "From now on let's just stay away from her There's no reason to let someone like that drag us down."

P.n

Nancy still remembered how Charlotte had left her to fend for herself, almost landing her in jail. I Olivia hadn't stepped in, found a lawyer and bailed her out, she'd probably still be sitting at the police Station. Nancy wasn't about to let Charlotte off the hook. This wasn't over-not by a long shot.

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Charlotte followed the GPS until she found Anthony.

A sleek gray Bugatti Veyron was parked along a quiet street. Anthony stood by the car, impossible to miss. Even from a distance, he looked effortlessly handsome, hands in his pockets, watching her approach with a lazy, teasing smile that lingered at the corners of his mouth.

He didn't look away, just kept his gaze locked on Charlotte as she walked up. For once, she was dressed neatly, her uniform prim and proper, making her look even younger than usual. She almost looked like a teenager, and Anthony couldn't help but remember the way she'd snapped at him before. "When you were in college, I was still in third grade!" She might as well have called him ancient.

"Lottie, over here," he called.

It had been ages since anyone called her that. Charlotte glanced up, meeting Anthony's eyes. He looked so relaxed, that easy smile still on his face, but something in her chest tightened. She frowned, almost in spite of herself.

"Uncle," she said, her voice coming out soft and a little lazy.

There it was again. "Uncle." Anthony let out a low laugh. He reached out, like he was about to pinch her cheek, but stopped halfway. She was just looking at him, her eyes wide and clear, like she had never been touched by the world. He suddenly felt like even the smallest touch might ruin that.

So he let his hand fall to her forehead instead, gently brushing her bangs out of her eyes. If she wanted to keep calling him "uncle," he'd let her... for now. He figured he'd get his chance to change that eventually.

"Let's get something to eat. What do you feel like?" Anthony checked the time. Class had just ended, so she probably hadn't eaten yet.

Charlotte had grabbed a couple of hand pies that morning, so she wasn't hungry. She opened her mouth to say no, but Anthony beat her to it. "I've been waiting here for you for two hours. I'm starving."

Up front, Hans almost choked. Two hours? They'd barely been here ten minutes. Did Anthony ever feel bad about lying so easily?

"Whatever," Charlotte said. She slid into the passenger seat.

As soon as she sat down, Anthony leaned over, reaching for her seatbelt. He buckled her in, careful not to brush against her clothes or her arm.

"We'll go to The Oak & Vine," he said.

Charlotte blinked, a little surprised, but she covered it quickly. Of course he'd pick that place.

Fifteen minutes later, Anthony led her into The Oak & Vine, the most exclusive restaurant in Cabinda. The place was famous for its stunning menu and beautifully plated dishes. The top-floor private dining room was all glass, with a view that stretched out over the whole. Getting a reservation here was almost impossible unless you had real pull.

"Sit wherever you like," Anthony said, pulling out a white lace-trimmed chair for her.

Charlotte sat down, tugging her skirt

into place as it tried to ride up.

Anthony noticed, his eyes darkening just for a second. He quietly told a waiter to bring a blanket

"Is it new? Sterilized?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," the waiter replied quickly.

Anthony took the blanket and walked over to Charlotte. He crouched down and gently tucked the soft blanket over her legs, making sure she was covered.

"If you need anything, just tell me."

Charlotte glanced at him, something unreadable flickering in her eyes, and nodded. "Okay."

She was almost too well-behaved. Anthony smiled, just a little, and sat back in his chair. His voice was low and smooth. "Let's look at the menu."

"Please wait a moment, sir," the waitress said respectfully, then left to get the manager, Coulomb.

Anthony was a top-tier VIP here. Every month, he came in, and every time the manager greeted him personally.

A few minutes later, Coulomb

appeared. He was dressed in a

sharp black tuxedo and white gloves, carrying a thick, sparkling menu that looked like it belonged in a jewelry store rather than a restaurant.

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"Anthony, long time no see." Coulomb gave a respectful little bow as he greeted him.

"Let the lady order first," Anthony replied.

"Of course." Coulomb turned to Charlotte with the menu in hand, but as soon as he saw her, his smile froze. That face... he knew it far too well. Wasn't this...?

Charlotte set her glass down and caught Coulomb's stunned look, her voice calm and unhurried. "It's my first time here. I've never tried anything on the menu. Anthony, you pick."

Never been here before? Coulomb hesitated, glancing at her again. "Are you sure, miss? You really haven't been here before?"

Was it possible for two people to look exactly the same, sound the same, and move in the same way? No way. Even after three months apart, he'd never mistake his boss for someone else. That face was unforgettable.

Charlotte pushed the menu back, laced her fingers under her chin, and smirked. "If I say I haven't, then I haven't."

Coulomb got the message and handed the menu to Anthony.

Anthony scanned the menu, but his attention kept drifting to Charlotte. She looked bright and beautiful, her features delicate and lively. When it was just the two of them, she'd call him uncle and tease him about being old. In front of other people, she always called him Anthony, giving him some respect. She really knew how to take care of someone's pride.

"We'll have the tomato beef stew, pan-seared lamb chops, tuna ham salad, and a slice of cake."

Coulomb shot another quick look at Charlotte. What exactly was going on between her and Anthony? She'd never mentioned him before, and they'd never come in together, but Anthony knew her favorites by heart. Every single dish.

"Right away, Anthony, Miss Charlotte." Coulomb hurried off with the menu.

Dishes started coming out one after another.

"No need for any more service. You can all go," Anthony said.

"Yes, sir!"

Once everyone left, the two of them had the whole floor to themselves.

"These dishes are all pretty good. Try them," Anthony said, ladling soup into a bowl

for her and using serving chopsticks to fill her plate.

Charlotte took a sip, tasting it carefully. She looked up with a little smile. "It's

delicious."

Anthony reached over with a napkin, gently wiping the corner of her mouth. "If you like it, I'll bring you here again." His voice was low and smooth, almost hypnotic.

Charlotte bit her spoon and didn't answer. Was he already lining up an excuse for next time? She stayed quiet but Anthony didn't mind. Being cautious was a good thing, less chance of being tricked.

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Hans had left early. After lunch, Anthony drove Charlotte back to campus himself.

On the way, Anthony's phone rang.

"Charlotte, can you answer that for me?"

Charlotte was busy typing out a message: "Pretend you didn't see et

me today. And don't give Anthony any discounts." As soon as she sent it, she picked up Anthony's phone.

"It's your grandmother."

"Just put it on speaker," Anthony said, giving her a soft, reassuring smile.

Charlotte felt a little awkward, but she did what he asked.

"Grandma, I just finished lunch. What's up?" Anthony's polite tone was immediately met with a burst of scolding from the other end.

"Lunch? At your age, you still have an appetite?" Patricia's voice was strong and feisty.

"Why didn't you show up for that blind date I arranged? Anthony, you're almost thirty! Are you trying to drive me crazy?"

"Grandma, I've been busy." Anthony listened quietly, his eyes lingering on Charlotte's confused expression, a faint smile curving his lips. "Besides, just because I'm a little older doesn't mean I don't have anything to offer. I'm sure there's a girl out there who like me."

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"And you really think someone would fall for you?" Patricia shot back, completely clueless about how much of a catch Anthony was back in Cabinda.

The light turned red, and the car slowed to a stop. Anthony reached into the glove box, pulled out a carton of milk, popped a straw in, and handed it to Charlotte.

Charlotte was busy scrolling through her phone, but she turned her head without thinking. Her eyes met his, dark and intense, and her lashes gave the tiniest flutter. She blanked for a second, then took the milk and started sipping.

"Grandma, you really don't need to worry about this."

Anthony rested his hand on the back of Charlotte's seat, watching her with a soft, teasing smile that wouldn't leave his lips.

"How can I not worry?" Patricia's voice turned sharper. She paused, then suddenly seemed to remember something. Her tone dropped to a whisper.

"Anthony, is it true? The rumors... do you actually like men?"

Charlotte choked on her milk, coughing hard enough for her throat to sting.

"Don't move." Anthony frowned and grabbed a tissue, dabbing at the milk that had spilled on her shirt.

"Grandma, I've got something going on here. I'll call you back." He hung up right away.

Back at home, Patricia stared at her phone, then looked over her shoulder at the housekeeper. "'Did I just hear a girl's voice?"

The housekeeper's cheeks turned pink. "Yes, I did too. She even made a cute little noise and Mr. Anthony told her not to move."

"See, Patricia? Now you can relax. Anthony is perfectly healthy," the housekeeper teased.

Patricia clapped a hand over her mouth, trying to hide a smile. The relief and excitement were too much.

"He has a girlfriend and didn't tell me? Or maybe that girl..." Patricia's face turned cold. She was not about to accept some random girl with a shady background.

The housekeeper rushed to reassure her. "Come on, Mrs. Patricia, your grandson has good taste. He wouldn't pick someone who doesn't deserve him."

"You're right." Patricia let out a tiny laugh. Her grandson was always upright and disciplined, never got mixed up with those spoiled

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worried he might have some health problem. Clearly, she was overthinking.
The smile came back to Patricia's face. Now she was dying to know what kind
of girl had finally stolen Anthony's heart.

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Meanwhile, Anthony was wiping Charlotte's hand clean. Soft music played in
the quiet car, filling the space with a gentle calm.

Charlotte lounged back in her seat, eyes drifting over to Anthony. He looked
effortlessly perfect in his suit, the top buttons of his white shirt undone, sharp
features catching the light. He drove with one! hand lazy smile at the corner
of his mouth eyes shining with something mischievous and tempting.

No wonder girls went crazy for him.

But did guys like him too? The thought caught her off guard.

Anthony noticed her staring and shot her a knowing look, his smile curving
just a bit. "What's got you looking at me like that?"

"Nothing," Charlotte replied, turning quickly to look out the window, her eyes
sparkling with something she wouldn't name.

"Oh?" Anthony's voice was low and playful, eyes full of quiet laughter. He
really was

the kind of trouble you couldn't say no to.

A few minutes later, Anthony pulled the car over on a street just five minutes
from the school.

He got out, circled to her side, opened her door, and handed her a cute bag.
Charlotte recognized it right away. It was dessert from The Oak & Vine-her
absolute favorite mango flavor.

"If you get hungry this afternoon, you can have this."

Charlotte looked up at him, her face unreadable. After a heartbeat, she
reached out and took the bag. Their fingers brushed. The touch sent warm
spark racing up her arm... Teaving her cheeks tingling and hot.

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Charlotte's heart did a double skip, a rush of excitement spreading from her
chest to every corner of her body. She wasn't resisting the feeling. If anything,

she wanted to reach out and touch him again.

"I'm heading inside now."

She grabbed her dessert, tilting her head down just enough to hide the bit of blush blooming behind her ears.

She hadn't gone far when Anthony called out to her.

"Lottie."

Charlotte turned, meeting his gaze. He stood there, casual and relaxed, his dark eyes locking onto hers. For a few seconds, neither of them said anything. Then Anthony spoke, his voice deep and rough, but soft in a way that made her heart thump even harder.

"I'm actually pretty normal, you know."

Charlotte pressed her lips together, her big eyes shining clear as glass. The sunlight caught her face, making her look almost ethereal. She looked so sweet and well-behaved, the kind of girl you'd want to keep safe and close.

If he wasn't worried about scaring her away...

Anthony couldn't help but smile, a little helpless and a lot fond. "Go on, get to class, kid."

A tiny smile flickered on Charlotte's lips. She turned and walked back toward the school.

Once she was around the corner, she pulled out her phone and called Coulomb. "For Anthony's lunch today, give him a twenty percent discount."

Meanwhile, Andrew and Parrish had just left the cafeteria. As they walked out, they spotted a flashy sports car parked nearby.

Parrish rubbed his eyes, then nudged Andrew. "Isn't that your cousin's car?"

Andrew and Anthony were cousins. Andrew looked over, recognizing it right away. He hadn't gotten into any trouble lately, so what was Anthony doing here?

"Andrew, I'm gone. Good luck, man." Parrish patted Andrew's shoulder and hurried off.

Nobody wanted to mess with Anthony.

"Coward," Andrew muttered, still debating whether he should run when suddenly, he found himself staring straight into a pair of sharp, With cold eyes is heardropper.

no choice, he walked over and greeted respectfully, "Anthony."

Anthony stood by the car, hands in his pockets, looking down at Andrew, who was quite a bit shorter. "Grandma wants to see you. Go home early after school."

That was it? Andrew had braced himself for a lecture or worse. Turned out he was just the messenger.

Anthony didn't say anything else, just got in the car. He buckled up, started the engine, and was about to leave when his phone buzzed. Lottie was calling.

The moment he saw her name on the screen, his expression softened. His voice turned husky, carrying a hint of warmth. "Charlotte?"

"You still have something of mine, she said, calm as ever. "Weren't you supposed to give it back to me

today? We had lunch, but you didn't return it."

Anthony looked back and saw the bag on his backseat with a black baseball cap

inside. He had picked it up outside the bar that night.

He rested his wrist on the open window, a smile tugging at his lips. "Guess 'm getting old. My memory's not great these days. I forgot to give it to you Next time, okay? I'll bring it with me then."

"Next time?" Charlotte pursed her lips, her lashes fluttering. "You better take something for your memory before you come."

Anthony let out a low laugh, full of affection. "Alright. Whatever you say."

Charlotte hung up, trying to slow her racing heartbeat. She glanced down at the cake in her arms, suddenly feeling a lot lighter.

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From the school gate to her classroom, Charlotte could feel everyone staring. The

whole "illegitimate daughter" rumor had already made its way around.

A small, cold smile played on her lips. She wasn't going to waste time on that nonsense right now. She walked on, unfazed.

Back in the classroom, she hooked a chair with her foot, sat down, and reached into her bag. Her hand brushed against something long, cold, slippery... and moving.