The Mocked Miss’s Hidden Crowns – Chapter 86

"How did you even know how to solve that?"

Charlotte didn't answer right away.

Andrew and Parrish crowded closer, curiosity all over their faces. When they caught sight of the solution on her worksheet, their expressions shifted. That problem was practically competition level. Most students wouldn't even know where to start, and even the physics teacher would have to think twice. But Charlotte? She only glanced at it for three seconds, tops.

Now Shirley, Andrew, and Parrish were all staring at her, suspicion and awe mixed

in their eyes.

Charlotte realized she'd let her real ability slip. Her hand paused for a second as she gripped her pen, lashes fluttering. She cleared her throat and tried to sound casual. "I learned it before."

Learned it before? More like she'd memorized the whole answer. At least, that's what everyone was thinking. That made a lot more sense.

Shirley started tidying her desk, giving Charlotte a gentle smile. "If there's anything from today's worksheet you still don't get, you can ask me. Anytime." She sounded sincere, but it also reminded her that she'd just gotten a thousand bucks from Charlotte.

"No problem," Charlotte replied, leaning back in her chair. Her slender arm rested on the desk, her face cool and distant, like she wasn't really part of the group. It was hard to tell if she even wanted anyone to get close.

Shirley packed up her things, ready to leave, when her phone suddenly rang. She glanced at the screen and her whole demeanor changed. She fumbled to answer. "Grandma, what's wrong?" she asked, her voice tight with worry.

Charlotte noticed Shirley's anxious look and glanced over, her eyes darkening with concern.

Shirley let out a breath. "As long as you're okay. You're still sick, remember? Don't go out. I'll come home after class tonight."

Once she was sure her grandma was all right, Shirley's smile returned. She waved at Charlotte. "See you, Charlotte. I'm heading out!"

Just as she turned around, she bumped right into Andrew, who'd just stood up. The collision made both of them wince.

"OW..."

"S-sorry, sorry," Shirley stammered, rubbing her head. She grabbed her books and practically ran like she Was escaping something scary. She knew better than to mess with Andrew.

Andrew rubbed his forehead, leaning forward a little as he watched Shirley

hurry out, “What s chasing her?

ghost?" he muttered. "Why's she

running like that?"

fo

Charlotte let out a quiet laugh and pulled out her phone. She opened a hidden

website and, almost instantly, an email popped up on the screen.

[3S-Level Bounty]

Reward: $50 million

Target: Hacker, Nine

Client: Confidential

Task: Build a secure system

Charlotte barely glanced at it. Same old thing. Probably another enemy trying to set

her up. Without hesitation, she hit Reject.

As soon as news got out that Nine had rejected the job, the public chatroom exploded.

Did I see that right? Nine, missing for a year, just logged into Find?

Nine is wild. Fifty million dollars and he just says no.

He's alive? The legend of the hacking world!

Who was Nine, anyway? On Find, the world's top data system, he was the highest-ranked hacker, the one who only took on the toughest jobs and always finished them. Once, just for fun, hed helped the military rack an enemy network and caught a bunch of fugitives.

No one knew if Nine was a man or a woman, old or young, or even where they were

from. People thought he'd retired. Now, out of nowhere, he was back.

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Turning down a job like that... must mean he's not hurting for cash.

Charlotte scrolled through the chat, her lips curling into a small smile. There was a sparkle of mischief in her bright eyes. Fifty million, just to lure her out? Please. People were always using hacker bounties as bait, hoping to drag her into the open. There was never a shortage of folks who wanted her gone for good.

If they upped the price a bit, maybe she'd consider it. She could always pretend the danger didn't bother her and take a quick job.

She logged out of the site without a second thought.

Andrew, finally recovered from his earlier shock, caught the hint of a smile on Charlotte's face. He stared for a second, then blurted out, "Charlotte, what's so funny?"

She gave him a cool look, her expression turning all serious in an instant. "Kids shouldn't ask so many questions."

Andrew frowned. Wasn't he older than her? Did she really just talk to him like some kind of grown-up? He wasn't having it.

He started to say something, but before he could get a word out, Charlotte tossed a worksheet in his face. She yawned, looking bored out of her mind. "Go study. Stop bugging me."

She turned away, leaving Andrew's protest stuck in his throat. Why did he always go so soft around her?

...

After class, Charlotte got called to the office.

Eleanor sat at her desk, eyes gentle as she watched Charlotte standing there-perfect posture, pretty face, looking every bit the model student. Still, Eleanor frowned.

"Charlotte, I've given this a lot of thought. Aiming for second place in the grade just isn't realistic. How about I talk to Mr. Lee for you? If you apologize, maybe we can just let this go, okay?"

With her grades where they were, there was no way. Expulsion was almost certain.

Charlotte lifted her head at Eleanor's words, her clear eyes turning cold. "No." She said it quietly, but there was no room for argument.

"You're really not afraid of being expelled?" Eleanor sounded worried.

"I won't be expelled." Charlotte straightened, her gaze steady one Eleanor “I know you put yourself on the line for me, standing up to Ronald Lee. That couldn't have been easy."

"I'm not worried about myself..."

"I know," Charlotte said softly. "Ms. Adams, you know how Ronald Lee is. If Lapologized now, he wouldn't forgive far He'd just find another me.

reason to make things worse. You'd

only have a harder time with him

later."

"I get all that, but Charlotte, how are you supposed to get second in the whole

grade? It's just not possible."

"That's my problem, not yours."

Charlotte clasped her hands behind

her back, sounding totally

Howard can it be? it's just a test.".

Eleanor was speechless for a moment. If it was really that easy, why were they even

having this conversation? This kid was just impossible.

With a sigh, Eleanor waved her off. "Fine, do whatever you want.”

“Okay.” Charlotte gave a polite bow and walked out.

"Oh, one more thing..." Eleanor suddenly called after her. "There are a lot of rumors about you on the school forum. Has it bothered you at all?”

"Not really," Charlotte replied, sounding completely at ease, like it was none of her business.

Eleanor could only watch her go, more confused than ever. She really didn't know what to make of this girl.

The Mocked Miss’s Hidden Crowns – Chapter 88

It was ten at night when Charlotte stepped out of the school gates, slinging her backpack over one shoulder. She paused on the curb, scanning the street. No sign of Anthony anywhere. Instead, she spotted the Main family's car parked nearby.

Steven was outside by the window, holding a little cake box, talking to Olivia

with a soft, doting smile. Whatever he said made Olivia light up and press closer to him. They looked exactly like those picture-perfect families you see in movies, all warmth and affection.

The driver, on his way to start the car, glanced up and spotted Charlotte standing alone in the glow of a streetlight. He looked surprised and leaned over to quietly let Steven know, "It's Charlotte."

Steven turned. The smile on his face vanished so fast it was almost funny. Charlotte stood under the streetlight, looking almost untouchable, her pale skin glowing, her features impossible to ignore. Even surrounded by people, she looked completely alone, like she had nowhere left to go.

Without the Main family, she was nothing, he thought.

"Dad..." Olivia handed the cake to the driver and slipped her arm through Steven's, her voice sweet. "Charlotte's right there. Should I go ask her to come home with us?"

She didn't wait for his reply. She tugged Steven along and stopped in front of Charlotte, putting on her gentlest voice. "Charlotte, don't be mad at Dad anymore. Come home, okay?"

Charlotte's eyes went cold. She didn't bother to hide her irritation. "You've got some nerve," she said, sounding almost bored. "Cut the act."

Olivia's breath caught. Her eyes went a little red, but before she could say anything, Steven pulled her behind him and glared at Charlotte. "What did you say?"

He'd already heard about what Charlotte had done, flaunting her status and embarrassing Olivia at school in front of everyone. Now, Olivia was still trying to smooth things over and ask her to come home. She should be grateful.

But this girl... she just didn't know her place.

"Dad, she's not trying to upset you. Please, just let her come home," Olivia pleaded, hugging Steven's arm and giving it a gentle shake.

Steven looked down at her hopeful face. His anger faded a little. He couldn't say no to her.

"She can come home," he said, looking hard at Charlotte. "But she has to apologize to you first."

"Dad..."

"Olivia, stop speaking up for her," Steven cut her off, his voice sharp. He turned to Charlotte. "Did you hear me?"

Charlotte pulled her jacket around her shoulders and slowly lifted her gaze. She watched them for a few seconds then let out a laugh, pure, Sarcasm curting or her lips What is this, a soap opera?"

Steven's jaw clenched. He could feel his temper boiling.

"Charlotte, Dad and I really want you to come home," Olivia said softly, her voice trembling a little as she sniffed.

Really?

Charlotte stared right at her. "Last time I left, I said whoever tried to make me come back would be the fool. So, is it you, or is it your dad?"

"Charlotte!"

"I'm not deaf. No need to yell," Charlotte shot back, her eyes icy. "Are you done? If you are, then get out of my sight."

Steven's fingers curled into fists. He barely held himself back from slapping her. If they weren't standing in front of the school he would have shown this ungrateful brat what real discipline meant.

"Charlotte you'll come crawling back to me one day." Steven grabbed

Olivia's hand, fuming. "Olivia, let's go Leave her to figure things out on her own." .

BUMS

The Mocked Miss's Hidden Crowns – Chapter 89

"Dad..." Olivia put on an act, pretending to resist as she got into the car. She didn't forget to peek back at the lonely figure standing under the streetlight.

Poor thing. Nobody wants her.

A few seconds later, the car pulled away, leaving Charlotte alone and fading from view.

A handful of students had seen everything from the sidewalk.

"I heard online her dad flipped out because she pulled strings to get into the school. Watching that just now, it actually seems true."

"So you really think Charlotte did something shady to get into Vanguard High?"

"Isn't it obvious?" chimed in a student from Class A, one of Olivia's friends. "Olivia might not be from the main family, but she works hard and she's good

at everything. She's way better than Charlotte, honestly."

Not long after, a video of Charlotte being left on the side of the road by her own dad started blowing up on the school forum.

In the clip, Olivia looked like the bigger person, quietly begging Charlotte to come home, only for Charlotte to make things difficult. The comment section was full of people feeling sorry for Olivia and trash-talking Charlotte.

Anthony parked and got out of his car.

He looked around and finally spotted Charlotte curled up under a big tree near the school gates. She was hugging her backpack, head down, face hidden in the shadows. The streetlight made her look even smaller and more lost.

He couldn't help but remember last night, catching her crouching in a corner with red-rimmed eyes.

"What are you doing?" His voice was low, warm, and just a little rough as he walked over, kneeling in front of her.

Charlotte looked up slowly. She was pale, lips pressed tight. "You're late."

"Only by two minutes."

The way she complained sounded so fragile, and her face just looked wrong.

Anthony frowned, concern flickering across his face. He reached for her cold hand, his voice softer now. "Sorry. Traffic was bad."

Charlotte stood, staring at her shoes, silent and tense. The air around her felt heavy.

Anthony's lips twitched into a small smile. Lottie was mad. Clearly, she needed a little extra attention.

He took her bag, handing it off to Hans, who stood there looking stunned. Anthony chuckled quietly. "My fault this time. I'm sorry."

Hearing his gentle apology, Charlotte's eyebrows moved, just barely.

"It's cold out. Let's get in the car, okay?"

A tiny spark lit up in her eyes. She glanced at him, long lashes fluttering, a little stubborn. "If you're late next time, I'm not waiting."

Anthony tapped her forehead lightly, finally letting out a breath. He looked at her with a mix of exasperation and affection.

"Such a little thing, but your temper's something else."

She really wasn't easy to win over.

In the car, Charlotte sat quietly in the back, eyes empty, watching the world pass by outside the window.

Anthony had noticed right away that

something was off. He closed the folder he'd been reading and set it

aside Gently be brushed the hair from her forehead and leaned in, his voice deep and steady.

"Still mad at me?"

Charlotte looked up on instinct and met his gaze. His eyes were intense, drawing her in, and suddenly her heart was pounding so hard she could barely breathe

He was close, so close she could smell the clean scent that was always just his. It filled her head overwhelming the calm she tried so hard to keep.

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Anthony had been this close to Charlotte before, but never with both of them fully awake, facing each other like this. She had such delicate features, her skin so pale you could almost see the tiny veins beneath the surface. Her eyes were clear, almost sparkling, and right now she was staring straight at him without looking away.

He squinted, frowning a little, that odd feeling tugging at him again. Her eyes seemed so familiar, like he'd seen them somewhere before. He was good with faces, rarely forgot someone he'd met, but for some reason, he just couldn't remember where he'd seen Charlotte before.

"This is the first time, and it'll be the last," Anthony said, his voice low and gentle, patient in a way that almost felt like a promise. "I won't leave you waiting again, okay? Don't be mad at me, alright?"

"I'm not." Charlotte's lashes fluttered as she shifted back a bit, her voice soft. "I'm not angry at you."

"Then who are you mad at? You won't even look at me, and you haven't said a word." Anthony let out a quiet laugh, reaching for a blanket and draping it over her legs.

Charlotte glanced down, pressing her lips together. "It's nothing," she replied, her tone cool. "Just some dogs barking at the school gate, messed with my mood."

Dogs barking? Anthony looked at her, the corners of his mouth lifting in a

knowing smile. He'd been to Vanguard High plenty of times. That place was locked down tight. No way dogs or even flies-could sneak in. Lottie really wasn't being honest.

Imperial Heights

When they got home, Charlotte disappeared upstairs to shower. Anthony handed her coat to Helen, loosening his tie as he spoke in a low voice, “Did you get the security footage?"

"Yes, Anthony," Hans replied right away, passing him a phone.

The video showed Charlotte at the school gate, talking to a man and a girl. Hans explained, “That's Ms. Main's father and her stepsister. From the looks of it, things didn't go well. They left on a bad note."

Her father and stepsister... Anthony watched the video, noticing how close the two looked. His lips curled into a bitter little smile. This father seriously played favorites, treating his stepdaughter even better than his own child. No wonder Charlotte got kicked out.

"Stop all business with The Main Group for the next month," Anthony said, his eyes never leaving the image of Charlotte sitting under a tree. His gaze was cold now, completely different from the gentle warmth he'd shown before.

"Yes, sir." Hans blinked in surprise, then quickly nodded. So Anthony was standing up for Ms. Main.

"Also, what did you find out about Charlotte's five years in Lamplighter Village?" Anthony asked.

Hans answered respectfully, "From

what the villagers say, Ms. Main spent her first year in a sanatorium She escaped, and an elderly man took her in. He's passed away Row. Since she lived alone with him his family really doesn't know much about her time there."

In other words, they hadn't found anything useful.

Anthony considered it for a moment. If she really did know medicine, maybe she

picked it up from the village doctor. There was just so much about her that didn't add

up.

"Alright, you can go," he said.

Anthony stood and headed upstairs, calling out as he went, "From now on,

once Ms. Main goes to bed, no one is allowed on the third floor."

That pretty much meant the third floor was just for him and Charlotte.

“Yes, sir!” The maids glanced at each other, faces turning pink as they caught on.

Charlotte finished her shower and climbed into bed, propping herself up with a pillow, her tablet resting on her lap. She tapped the screen with a stylus, not really paying attention Shirley was being impossible texting her physics problems in the middle of the night.