

The Mocked Miss's Hidden Crowns – Chapter 91

She almost wished she'd given Shirley less money. Maybe then she wouldn't be working so hard.

A soft knock at the door.

Anthony appeared, tall and broad-shouldered, a grey robe hanging loosely on him. His hair was still damp from the shower, making him look even more handsome, like he'd just stepped out of a magazine. He crossed the room with those long, easy strides.

"Milk," he said.

He sat on the edge of the bed and handed Charlotte a warm glass. As she took it, his eyes flicked to her tablet, and he smiled, a little indulgent, a little amused. "Are you studying?"

Charlotte drank the milk in silence and mumbled a quiet "Yeah."

She wasn't sure if the problems were too hard or if she was just tired and annoyed, but her scratch paper was a mess. No calculations, just a bunch of lopsided, ugly turtles doodled all over the page.

No wonder her last test score was so bad. She probably had no idea how to solve any of these.

"Which question is giving you trouble? I can help." Anthony grabbed a clean sheet and pointed to a problem on her screen. "This one?"

Charlotte glanced at it. Halfway through reading, she already knew the answer. Seriously? This was basic sophomore stuff. Shirley was really trying to build her foundation from scratch.

Anthony caught her silence and smiled a little, his voice low and soothing.

"With this one, start by plugging in the formula. According to Newton's second law..."

His voice drifted around her, warm and steady.

Charlotte tilted her head, watching him in the soft light. Anthony's profile was striking, shadows and gold mixing across his sharp features. Even when he was focused, he looked effortlessly elegant.

He seemed to notice her stare. Anthony turned, his dark eyes narrowing with a teasing glint. He tapped her nose with the stylus, grinning. "Eyes on your worksheet."

Charlotte blinked and dutifully looked away.

"So, what's the answer?" he asked.

"A," she replied, without missing a beat.

Anthony's eyes flashed with approval. He'd only explained the general idea, hadn't even started the calculations, and she'd already.

Howd she end up with the
solved it. She was pretty sharp
sucha score?

"Next one..."

"I'm tired." Charlotte tossed her tablet aside and collapsed onto the bed, pulling the

blanket over herself. "No more studying."

Anthony checked his watch. It was pretty late.

"If you ever get stuck, just ask me." He moved the little table aside and pulled the blanket up around her shoulders careful and gentle, almost like he was tucking in a kid

Charlotte gripped the blanket, her bright eyes fixed on him. She asked, completely serious, "Do you charge for tutoring?"

Anthony leaned closer, bracing his hands on either side of her. His dark eyes softened with a smile. "For you, it's free."

Charlotte's eyes sparkled.

"Sleep early," Anthony said, brushing a hand over her hair. He reached for the lamp,

but before he could switch it off, she caught his wrist.

Charlotte frowned, her voice clear and cool. "Leave it on."

"Are you afraid of the dark?" Anthony asked quietly. It clicked for him then-the last couple of times he'd carried her back to her room, the lights had always been on Abandonment, abuse, a fear of the dark... What else had she been through?

"Okay." Anthony let go of the lamp and bent down, gently squeezing her hand. "Goodnight. Sweet dreams."

Please, he thought, just stay put tonight.

It was three in the morning. The house was silent and pitch black. The sound of a lock turning echoed through the quiet. Footsteps padded softly toward

the bed.

Anthony was a light sleeper. The second he heard the door open, he woke up. Here we go again.

The Mocked Miss's Hidden Crowns – Chapter 92

The lamp flickered on, casting a faint pool of light across Charlotte's blank face.

"Lottie?"

Anthony sat up in bed, his voice gentle. Charlotte didn't react. Her eyes were empty, fixed straight ahead as she walked slowly toward him. There was no doubt about it. She was sleepwalking again.

She reached the bed, pulled back the covers without hesitation, and climbed in beside him. Her arms found him easily, wrapping around his arm as she pressed her face into his chest. She held on tight, clinging to him with a sadness that felt heavier than before.

Anthony remembered everything she'd gone through that day. He brushed his hand over her silky hair and gave a helpless smile. "So, is it my room you like, or is it my bed?"

Charlotte didn't answer. She just nestled in closer, her chin resting lightly on his shoulder. Her breathing was so soft and even, it was impossible to tell if she was really awake.

Anthony let out a quiet sigh and gently tried to scoop her up, planning to carry her back to her own room. But the second he lifted her, Charlotte's whole body tensed. She grabbed his hand and wouldn't let go, just like the last times. He wobbled, losing his balance, and Charlotte landed right on top of him.

"OW..."

Her teeth knocked hard against his forehead.

Anthony winced, raising his hand to the sore spot. When he pulled his fingers away, he saw a smear of blood.

He was bleeding.

But Charlotte, the one responsible, was curled up sweetly in his arms, still holding his hand, breathing slow and deep. Fast asleep.

Anthony had to bite back a laugh. There was no way he could wake her now, so he settled back, pulling the blanket over both of them. He looked down at her sleeping face, his hand softly tracing her cheek. The tenderness in his

eyes seemed to spill out, impossible to hide.

The next morning, sunlight poured through the windows, bright and almost blinding. Charlotte woke to its glare and instinctively shielded her eyes. She glanced at the door, frowning in confusion. Why did she never do anything weird when she slept in this room? Was there something magical about it?

She tossed aside the blanket and stood up. A quick, sharp pain shot through her head, and her teeth felt oddly sore. The headache made sense, but her teeth? That was strange.

Puzzled, Charlotte got dressed and opened the door. She barely had time to react before a giant, fluffy white Alaskan Malamute appeared right in front of her.

98K sat at attention outside her room, tail wagging like crazy the moment he saw her. He waited for her permission, not daring to come closer without it.

"Hey, what are you doing up here?" Charlotte rubbed his head, her voice still raspy from sleep. "Did Anthony let you come upstairs?"

98K pressed against her leg and circled around her, eager to please.

"Alright, let's go down."

At her words, he spun around and tore down the stairs, pausing every few steps to check if she was following.

Charlotte had barely reached the

bottom landing when she heard the maids shrieking in the hall. She looked over and saw them all

fouled together, shaking with fear while 98K strutted around, clearly enjoying himself.

Standing on the spiral staircase, Charlotte sighed and called out, "98K, over here."

He shook out his thick fur and trotted obediently back, dropping his leash in her hand.

The maids gaped at her. Who was Ms. Main, exactly? She had Anthony wrapped around her finger and now even his dog listened to her every word.

Charlotte hooked the leash and bent down to ruffle 98K's head, a little smile at the corner of her mouth. "You have to be nicer from now on, okay?" "Woof, woof..."

Right then, Anthony's deep, smooth voice floated over from behind her,

amusement coloring every word.

"You're only the second person he's ever let get so close."

Charlotte turned. Anthony stood there in a crisp white shirt and a perfectly-knotted dark blue tie, looking every inch the picture of cool confidence. But when her eye

2

reached his face, she froze,

There was a nasty scrape on his forehead.

She stared, confused and worried, and Anthony couldn't help but sigh.

"Staring at me first thing in the morning. What's on your mind?" His lips curled into a slow smile his voice warm and teasing.

"What happened to your head?" she asked.

"A little wildcat snuck into my room last night," Anthony replied, his eyes glinting with mischief. "She scratched me by accident."

"A wildcat?" Charlotte frowned. This place didn't seem like the kind of place wildcats would show up.

The Mocked Miss's Hidden Crowns – Chapter 93

Anthony just smiled and didn't bother explaining. He slipped his hand into Charlotte's and led her toward the main hall. With the two of them and the dog, the moment felt especially warm and peaceful.

On the way to Vanguard High School, Charlotte sat next to Anthony, completely at ease as she scrolled through her phone. Someone had secretly recorded what happened at the school gate yesterday and posted it on the school forum. By morning, the comments section had exploded, and every nasty word seemed aimed right at her.

First comment: I thought she only disrespected teachers, but apparently she doesn't care about her own father or sister either.

Next: Her attitude is so awful, even her own dad can't stand her.

Another: Look at Olivia, begging her to come home, and Charlotte just stands there, acting all high and mighty. So irritating.

Yet another: Olivia's honestly so pitiful. Just because she's a stepdaughter, Charlotte bullies her even when she tries her best.

The comments kept coming.

Post 128: Charlotte, get out of Vanguard High!

Post 129: Seriously, just leave already! Even the air here is better without her.

Charlotte read everything with a calm face, not a single emotion flickering across her delicate features.

Anthony glanced over and caught a glimpse of the comments on her screen. His eyes darkened. Was Lottie getting bullied at school?

"What happened?" he asked, twirling a piece of her silky hair around his finger, his voice lower than usual. "If something's wrong, you can tell me. I'll take care of it."

"Hmm?" Charlotte looked up at him, then shut off her phone with a soft, careless smile. "It's nothing. I'll handle it myself."

Anthony met her clear, deep eyes, noticing how pure and steady they were, almost hiding something sharp beneath the surface. He lifted an eyebrow but didn't push. He knew Charlotte wasn't as gentle as she seemed. She was tough and not someone anyone could easily push around.

At Vanguard High School, Charlotte walked in, pretending not to notice the stares and quiet whispers that followed her down the hallway. She made her way to her classroom and leaned casually against the wall, one hand on the desk and the other holding her phone. Her eyes were cool, almost icy, making people think twice before approaching.

She had challenged a teacher, talked back to her elders, bullied her stepsister... Her classmates watched her from the corners of their eyes, unsure what to think. She must have seen the forum. How could she look so unaffected after getting dragged like that?

Some of them even wondered if the rumors were true. Maybe she really had pulled strings to get into Vanguard High. Whoever helped her out must be someone important, someone even the principal would have to respect.

On the other side of the city, in a grand hall filled with the scent of old wood, a line of bodyguards stood perfectly still. At the head of the room sat a stern-looking man in his fifties. Next to him, Kenneth lounged

With his legs crossed, frowning.

printed photo from a security camera.

¶

The lead bodyguard spoke up. "Mr. Gates, Kenneth. We couldn't find her based on

the photo from the cameras."

Arthur Gates glared at the picture of

the girl on the motorcycle. Even with the helmet covering most of her face, he could see her tinyemet'

that made him almost

was connected to his sister Nora. Maybe she was Notter, the one the Gates family had been searching for all these years.

"Keep looking. I don't care if you have to search every inch of Cabinda. Find her."

"Yes, sir." The bodyguard bowed and left the room.

After they were alone, Kenneth looked up and spoke quietly. "Cabinda's huge. Finding one person's going to take time."

Arthur's frustration boiled over. "And whose fault is that? If you'd stopped her right then and brought her back to the Gates family, we wouldn't be in this mess."

Kenneth winced at the outburst and turned away. It wasn't like he hadn't tried. He just couldn't catch up.

Arthur sighed and paced, his eyes glued to Charlotte's photo. "Your grandfather's health isn't great. Don't let him know anything until we're sure. Your eldest brother is in the military, your second brother's still at school... No need to worry them either."

"Got it," Kenneth replied, sounding casual.

He thought back to the night he saw Charlotte. The way she carried herself, so fearless and confident, made him grin. No doubt about it—she had the Gates family blood in her.

The Mocked Miss's Hidden Crowns – Chapter 94

Vanguard High School, Class C.

By the end of the morning, Charlotte's head was pounding. When the bell rang, she leaned against the cold wall, rubbing her temples, a hint of chill in her eyes. This only happened when she hadn't slept well, but she could have sworn she got a full night's rest. Maybe it was because she'd skipped her medication.

She frowned, looking up just in time to spot Andrew and Parrish strolling in, both still in their basketball jerseys.

Andrew was messing with the cap on his water bottle, about to take a drink. Then he caught Charlotte looking at him, or rather, at the water in his hand. He glanced from her to the bottle, suddenly feeling nervous for no reason at all.

After a few seconds, he asked, "Charlotte, do you want some water?"

Charlotte didn't hesitate. She reached out her hand. "I'll give it back later."

Parrish's mouth twitched. The way she said it, it sounded more like she was robbing them than borrowing water.

Andrew felt something was off, but he quickly unscrewed the cap and handed her the bottle.

Charlotte took it, turned away, and took a couple of small sips. From behind, they couldn't see her face, just the way her black hair fell over her shoulders like a smooth waterfall, shifting as she tilted her head. The breeze caught a few strands, making it look almost unreal.

Andrew couldn't help but stare, completely distracted.

The cool water washed away some of the irritation in Charlotte's mind. She set the bottle on the desk, holding it between two fingers, then looked at Andrew and nodded. "Thanks," she murmured, her voice low. Then she walked right past him.

He started to say, "No pro-" but she was already gone.

As soon as she left, the air in the classroom seemed to lighten. Parrish took a deep breath and started fanning himself with a book. "Dammeevery time I see Charlotte, get the chills. She like a walking ghost."

Three years at this school, and no one had ever rattled him like that. Charlotte was the first.

"But for real, Andrew, it's one thing if I'm scared. You're supposed to be the school's top badass. Why are you so jumpy around her?"

Andrew hooked a chair with his foot, dropped into it, and stretched his long legs over the desk. "Jumpy?"

I'm scared

Me? You seriously think or he
of a girl?" Other

Other than Anthony, be

wasn't afraid of anyone.

Parrish clicked his tongue, then suddenly had an idea. He jumped up and shouted, "Charlotte!"

The second he heard her name, Andrew jumped to his feet too, his face turning pale.

When he realized the doorway was empty, his expression went cold.

Parrish burst out laughing, slapping the desk. "Andrew, you're sweating. Just hearing her name freaks you out and you still want to pretend you're not scared?"

Andrew caught on and swung at him. "Parrish, you're dead meat today."

Outside the restroom, Charlotte bent

over the sink, washing her hands

slowly under the running water. Sunlight slipped through the leaves, casting soft patterns on her pale,

slender hands and making them

look almost unreal. But her eyes stayed cold and distant, not a hint of warmth in them.

Nearby, two girls were washing their hands too. They couldn't help but sneak glances at Charlotte. Her pale, delicate hands, the elegant line of her neck, her small chin, her perfect nose...

The Mocked Miss's Hidden Crowns – Chapter 95

Wow. She was stunning. Seriously, had she ever even had work done? How did someone's features look this perfect in real life?

Charlotte was so much prettier in person than in any of those sneaky photos people posted on the forum. People kept saying Vanguard High was about to crown a new campus queen, and seeing her now, it was obvious Charlotte was more beautiful than Olivia.

She turned off the faucet and straightened up, drying her hands with slow, casual movements. Then she glanced over at the two girls next to her, her voice cool and uninterested.

"You need something?"

The sudden look from her sent chills down their spines. Both girls shook their heads, wide-eyed and a little terrified.

"No, nothing at all."

She really was gorgeous, but she was also kind of scary. No wonder she was the only one brave enough to stand up to Bald Lee.

The girls grabbed each other and hurried away.

Charlotte's lips twitched in a faint, almost bored smile. She tossed her paper towel in the trash and wandered toward Class C, taking her time.

Everyone passing her in the hallway instinctively stepped out of her way, like she was some kind of dangerous creature you didn't want to mess with.

Charlotte just raised an eyebrow, not bothered by any of it.

As she walked past the first-floor office, she suddenly heard someone yelling inside.

"Charlotte is a useless troublemaker. She's only fit for prison food in a prison cell!" Bald Lee's angry voice echoed down the hall.

Shirley was standing in the corner of the office, her head down as she quietly protested, "Charlotte isn't... she's not a delinquent." She was actually really nice. Nicer than anyone in Class A. She never picked on her and even paid for her tutoring.

Bald Lee saw Shirley's stubborn look and slammed his hand on the desk, glaring. "Shirley, this is my last warning. If I ever catch you hanging out with someone like her again, you can pack your things and leave Vanguard High with her."

He never liked Shirley. He was always worried she'd mess up his class's grades. He'd wanted her out of Class A for a while.

Shirley pressed her lips together, clearly unhappy but too scared to talk back. She just didn't believe Charlotte was going anywhere. It was almost weird. Even though Charlotte was dead last in class, Shirley had total faith in her.

"Stay here and reflect on your behavior!"

After scolding her, Bald Lee adjusted his glasses and stomped out of the office, his belly shaking as he went.

He'd barely made it a few steps when a broom suddenly slid right under his feet. He lost his balance and tumbled forward.

"Ah!"

He hit the ground face first, his nose and mouth smashing into the hard floor. With a muffled groan, he

slowly pushed himself up Blood trickled from his mouth where he'd bitten his tongue. '

"Mr. Lee, are you okay?"

A few students gasped in horror and ran to get the other teachers, who helped him to the nurse's office.

Once Bald Lee was gone, Shirley slipped out of the office and hid in a corner, peeking out. That had to hurt. At least he hadn't bitten his tongue off or he'd never talk again.

While Shirley was still processing everything, she saw a pair of long, straight legs step in front of her. They looked just as perfect as Charlotte's.

She looked up and her eyes went wide. "Charlotte? What are you doing here?"

Charlotte was leaning against the wall, looking as relaxed as always. She glanced over at Bald Lee, whose so swollen they barely
lips were and smirked Just

looked tear,

passing by."

"Just passing by?" Shirley didn't doubt her for a second. She hid her face with her book and whispered, "Looks like Mr. Lee won't be yelling at anyone for a while."

"Pretty unlucky for him," Charlotte said softly, her eyes half-closed. "I'm heading out."