

Reborn In Flames: The Heiress' Revenge Chapter 16

The classroom was packed, inside and out, but it was dead silent-until Cassie pulled out her phone and hit start on her

countdown timer.

Jennie, smeared with sticky juice from rotten fruit and feeling sick to her stomach, had no time to clean up. She spun around to face the other girls, her frustration boiling over. "What are you all just standing around for? Did I make this mess all by myself?"

The girls just stared at her, stunned into silence.

Cassie, however, remained unfazed by the chaos. She pulled out her textbook from her backpack and started flipping through the pages, looking cool and collected.

In no time, the scene had flipped entirely. The usual victim now stood off to the side with an air of detached authority, while the bullies huddled around a mess of trash, squabbling nonstop with each other.

Meanwhile, the guys were chatting away, clearly enjoying the spectacle.

"I gotta admit. Cassie's got some serious game.

"She's on fire"

Tve never liked how those rich kids throw their weight around at school. They act like real jerks."

"Seriously, Cassie looks amazing. How did I not notice that before?"

"Totally, less makeup is way better! What's with all the makeup anyway?"

As time ticked by, the crowd outside the classroom didn't thin out. If anything, it grew bigger as word spread about Cassie's showdown with Jennie.

"What's going on here?" Donald Gaiman, the homeroom teacher, interrupted the scene.

Donald had sharp features and looked a bit like a squirrel in a suit. He was also the vice president and a distant relative of Jennie. Jennie's uncle was on the school board, which had helped Donald get his position. He usually turned a blind eye to Jennie's troublemaking.

"Mr. Gaiman!" Jennie started crying the moment she spotted him.

“Shut up, Cassie snapped impatiently, slamming her book on the desk and cutting off Jennie’s so”Ca”ic, why are you bullying your classmates” *

Cassie remembered how she’d gone to Donald for help when she was the one getting bullied. But all he’d said was, “Why do they pick on you and not someone else? Maybe you should think about what you’re doing wrong.

“Mr. Gaiman, when have I bullied anyone?” Cassie replied **lly, meeting his gaze. Jennie and her friends dumped trash on my desk. Isn’t it normal for me to ask them to clean it up? If anything, they threw the trash on my desk on purpose. Isn’t that bullying

“It’s not that big of a deal. Just switch to a different desk, Donald said, clearly annoyed. “You girls quit fussing and get back to your seats. Class is about to start.

“There are still three minutes left; **ic shot back coldly, then she turned to Jennie and her crew. “Hurry up.”

The trash on the desk was already cleared away, but the real issue was the nasty words written there. With Cassie’s reminder, the girls quickly wiped down the desk, tears streaming down their faces and looking utterly defeated.

“Cassie, are you really challenging me? Donald snapped, surprised. He hadn’t expected the usually compliant Cassie to stand up to him.

“Sorry, Mr. Gaiman. I didn’t mean to be disrespectful,” Cassie said, tapping her fingers lightly on the desk. “But this is serious I think we need to call in our parents.”

Donald was taken aback. Even at this fancy private school, students rarely suggested bringing in their parents.

“Actually, my family is free right now. My parents have time to come in. Do you want me to help you make the call?” Cassie asked, feigning innocence.

Inviting the Murphy family over? That’d be a nightmare, Donald thought, his face turning pale. He knew Cassie hadn’t mentioned the bullying to her parents before, and if they came, he wouldn’t be able to keep things under wraps.

“Let’s not blow this out of proportion, Donald mumbled, his voice wavering.

“Oh Cassie raised an eyebrow. “When do you think would be the right time to do it then?”

Donald’s face turned an even deeper shade of grey.

In the last few minutes, the girls had been scrubbing away the nasty writing on the desk but hadn’t quite managed to get it

clean

“Cassie, I promise I’ll have it spotless by noon. Please, don’t tell my parents: One girl broke down in tears, ignoring the Crowd watching them.

“Why are you crying? Did I bully you? Cassie asked flatly, her expression unimpressed.

The girl covered her mouth and shook her head quickly.

Just then, the school bell rang. Cassie said slowly. “Let’s start class first.”

Jennie and the other girls exchanged nervous glances, unsure of what Cassie had planned but too scared to ask.

“Mr. Gaiman, can I go change..” Jennie, covered in trash, raised her hand, hoping to leave and clean up.

“Class is starting.” Cassie’s voice turned icy as she glanced over at Jennie, her impatience clear.

Jennie shivered at that tone and, with a tight fist, returned to her seat. The students around her instinctively pushed their desks away.

Donald stood at the front, staring at Cassie, shocked and confused. ‘What’s wrong with her? Has she gone crazy?

The classroom felt tense during the lesson. Donald was distracted, and the students were all over the place. The only one really focused was Cassie

When the painfully long class finally ended, Donald said grimly, “Cassie, come to my office, and left with his lesson plan in

hand

The classroom went silent. After a moment, someone shouted, “Cassie, that’s sick! You had Mr. Gaiman speechless!”

Cassie didn’t reply. She took her time packing up her things before standing to leave.

Hey, C**ic, what’s going on with Julia?” someone asked curiously.

Cassie shot a look at her. “What’s it to you?

The girl froze, her expression blank. After Cassie walked away, die girl muttered angrily,
“*D***

All eyes turned to Jennie, who exploded. "What are you all staring at?" *

No one wanted to cross Jennie. While some secretly enjoyed seeing her get a dose of her own medicine, they quickly looked away, not wanting to make things worse.

Jennie was devastated. She rushed off to change, tears streaming down her face.

Word about Cassie's bold moves spread like wildfire. As she walked down the hallway, every pair of eyes seemed glued to her, but she acted like she didn't notice. When she reached the teachers' lounge, she caught snippets of their conversation.

"It's absolutely outrageous! How could she shove a girl's head into a pile of trash? These rich kids think they can do whatever they want just because of their families," exclaimed Henry.

Cassie couldn't help but smirk. She had merely retaliated against Jennie's mess-nothing compared to the hell Jennie had put her through. Now the teachers were suddenly concerned about students' feelings?

She knocked on the door, and the room fell silent instantly. With the Murphy Group backing her, even if they despised her, they wouldn't dare show it—at least not now. This morning's little stunt was meant to make it clear: Cassie was no longer an easy mark.

"Here comes Cassie," Donald said, adjusting his glasses as she walked in. "Come have a seat. We need to talk."

Cassie stood her ground. "I still think I should call my parents, Mr. Gaiman."

Donald was at a loss for words.

"Cassie, you were always the model student. What's got into you today?" Tina asked, shaking her head. "Everyone's talking about this, and it's gonna make you look bad."

"Exactly. You privileged kids already attract enough attention. Just think how people will react if this gets out. What do you think they'll say about your parents?" Henry added.

I think you're right, Cassie replied calmly. "But I have a question."

"What is it?"

"You said I used to be a model student, but where were you guys when I was getting picked on?" Cassie shot back.

The teachers' expressions turned grim.

"What bullying? Kids mess around sometimes. It's not that serious."

“Right. Did you ever actually get hurt? I bet you didn’t.”

Cassie looked down, a sarcastic grin tugging at her lips. “If I’d gone home with bruises, you’d have been out of a job long ago. Would you still be giving me grief now?”

Silence fell in the room.

Jennie and her friends were pretty slick. They knew how to make Cassie’s life miserable without leaving any marks. Everyone knew the Murphy family was untouchable, so no one talked about it. Plus, with Julia pulling the strings, Cassie’s family never caught on to the bullying at school.

“You’re teachers, and I get that you want to keep me in line. But let’s be fair, Cassie said c**lly. “If what you call bullying was just kids messing around, then what I did today was just normal interaction

“Cassie, watch your tone! Donald banged his fist on the desk.

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In a school where the elite usually got special treatment, it was odd that Cassie was the exception. The reason was simple- they knew Cassie was the kind of student who’d keep quiet and not tell her parents what went down at school. What the teachers really feared wasn’t the students themselves but the powerful families behind them.

Family vacation packages

“Did I say something wrong. Mr. Calman?” Cassie challenges, locking eyes with him. “Or do you think Jennie dumping trash on my desk, tearing up my homework, and making me drink dirty water was just pulling my leg? And me asking her to clean up the mess is what you call bullying?”

Donald was left dumbstruck.

“Do you all feel the same way?” Cassie asked, her gaze sweeping over the other teachers. Despite her calm demeanor, her presence was intimidating, silencing those who had just come down on her from their moral high horse. The room was dead quiet at the moment.

Donald’s face drained of color. “Cassie, you used to be such a good student. What happened to you?” He sounded extremely disappointed

Cassie lowered her head and let out a laugh. Her voice was soft, yet it sent chills down everyone’s spine. The mood in the office turned icy.

In her past life, she had thrived on compliments like, "Cassie, you're such a model student," "Cassie, you come from the best family," or "Cassie, you're the perfect wife.

She had endured endless pain just to hear such praise. But in the end, all she got was a destroyed family and a life lost in

flames

"Yeah, I used to be a good student. I never looked down on teachers like some rich kids did because of my family's wealth. I was obedient and respectful..." Her smile turned more and more bitter "But it seems that kind of student isn't valued around here

The office fell into complete silence.

This isn't looking too good, is it?" Cassie tilted her chin slightly, her tone nonchalant but edged with steel.

"Cassie, I think you've got us all wrong." Tina said, her voice shaky. "We treat all students the same.

"Do you really believe that?" Cassie shot her a pointed look. "That's all I've got to say. If you teachers have nothing more to teach me, I'm heading back to class. If you still have a problem with me, I suggest you call my parents."

With that, Cassie didn't wait for Donald to respond and strode out of the office, leaving the teachers exchanging glances, stunned

"Did she lose her mind?"

"This isn't just losing her mind. She must have really flipped."

"Unbelievable!" Donald slammed his hand on the table again. "Just because she comes from a wealthy family, she thinks she can do whatever she wants? People like her are just a drain on society"

"Calm down, Donald. It's not just about her money. We can't afford to cross her, Tina said, a sour tone in her voice. "Honestly, there's not much we can do."

"I don't think so, Henry said with a shrug. "The big exams are coming up. If she keeps acting out and flunks her tests, we might have a way to straighten her out.

Donald's e

's eyes lit up. "I almost forgot about that, Cassie's as dumb as a rock. Let's just wait After the exams, we'll settle the

score.

There were dorms at the school, but hardly any students actually stayed overnight. They mainly served as a spot for the rich kids to relax and have fun. The dorm rooms were luxury singles complete with private bathrooms and closets-better than some five-star hotels

Jennie had just showered and changed into clean clothes. Now, she sat in front of her vanity, spraying perfume like crazy, She had washed several times, but the awful smell from earlier fast wouldn't fade.

Jennie, what's up with Cassie today? She's acting like a totally different person," asked Brianna Jones, one of Jennie's friends.

"Can we not talk about that b**h? It makes me sick." Jennie snapped, suddenly throwing her perfume bottle across the room. Glass shattered everywhere, and the other girls screamed.

Jennic, we've been bullied too! Why are you laking it out on us? We all feel the same way right now. Let's think of a solid plan for revenge, Brianna said firmly.

"Great, and how do you suggest we get back at her? She has got Murphy Group involved. You really think we can handle her like we used to Jennie replied impatiently. When Cassie had shoved her into a trash heap earlier, these so-called "friends" hadn't said a word.

"How about we find a spot without cameras, throw her in a bag, and drag her off for a little beating?" a girl with brightly colored hair suggested.

Didn't you see her bodyguards this morning? There's no way we're winning," Jennie shot back, rolling her eyes.

Just then, Brianna stepped closer with a sly smile. "What's the fun in just throwing punches? The Murphy family is mixed up in something way more interesting we could take advantage of

"Just spill it." Jennie's patience wore thin. She was overwhelmed by the lingering odor.

Julia's mess is still trending. Those gossip reporters are all over the Murphy family's estate right now. I bet they don't even know Cassie is back at school yet, Brianna said, looking at Jennie with a meaningful glance.

Jennie paused for a moment, then her eyes brightened. "Right! Why didn't I think of that? Let's tip off those gossip reporters and let them wait at the school gate when classes end"

Cassie's first day back at school, after she was being transported to the past, ended in a cheerful atmosphere.

Larry pulled up right on time to pick her up from the school building. This wasn't his first time picking up Cassie after school, but today, he noticed the students looking at him with strange expressions.

While Larry was trying to make sense of it all, Cassie walked out of the building casually with her backpack in her hand.

As Larry moved to greet Cassie, the nearby students suddenly parted like the Red Sea, quickly stepping aside to create a wide path for her.

Larry was shocked and asked Cassie curiously as he took her backpack from her, "Anything weird happened today, Ms. Murphy

Cassie squinted and smiled, "Not at all. Today was a great day."

"Okay" Larry glanced again at the visibly nervous students, then opened the car door for Cassie. Once she settled in, Larry jumped into the driver's seat and drove toward the school gate.

The students exchanged worried glances, unsure of how to react. After a while, one student broke the silence. "How did I not notice before? Cassie's legs are so long, and she looks amazing. When she smiled just now, it felt like she lit up the whole place."

Totally..."

"But she's a bit scary. Remember this morning when she yanked Jennie's hair and shoved her into the trash? That freaked me

I'm kind of satisfied, though. After all, they bullied her a lot more before."

As chatter filled the air, the once-quiet crowd buzzed with excitement. Some thought Cassie was really cool, while others criticized her for bullying. But mostly, they were just enjoying the drama.

Just then, someone shouted. "Holy cat! There are tons of reporters blocking the school gate!"

Larry's face darkened. Just ten minutes ago, he had checked the area around the school, and there were no reporters in sight

"Ms. Murphy, please step out and comment on the recent news about Julia!"

"Don't hide in the car. We came all this way. You should at least say a few words."

Lots of reporters pressed up against the car windows and shouted, their faces twisted and eager.

They had covered the wealthy elite for years and knew all about the Murphy family. They had mocked Cassie before for her quirky looks, and now that they had a chance to corner Cassie, the Murphy family's easy target, they weren't going to pass it up

Larry frowned. "How did so many reporters show up all at once)

Cassie was glued to her phone, her slender fingers flying over the screen as she typed.

Larry turned back to check on her and was shocked by what he saw.

Everyone knew Cassie hated being in front of the camera-she was terrified of it. But due to her family's status, she couldn't escape the spotlight. Larry had seen her trembling and staring at the ground whenever there were cameras around.

But now, she seemed completely unfazed by the chaos outside. She sat there, expressionless, typing on her phone as if nothing mattered.

"Larry, please tell them I'll do the interview," Cassie said, looking up at him, her charming eyes deep and unreadable.

Larry was about to object. Yet, the moment he met her gaze, he found himself nodding instinctively. He quickly snapped

back to reality and added, "No way, these reporters are relentless, You can't handle them."

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I can handle it." Cassie withdrew her gaze and continued typing on her phone. "Tell them I'll give them two minutes, but I'll only answer three questions.

"Ms. Murphy!" Larry got anxious.

Cassie had never seen him this worked up before. She chuckled and asked, "Larry, do you think why these reporters showed up at the school out of nowhere?

Larry frowned, deep in thought.

Cassie continued, "Someone had called them over

"It's my oversight." Larry's voice was heavy.

“Don’t take the blame for those sleazeballs. Cassie looked out at the crowd. “Even if I don’t go out today, the articles they write tomorrow will be brutal. So why not face them head-on? What do you think?”

Larry was shocked completely. He never expected the usually quiet Cassie to speak so boldly.

“Larry. I’m eighteen now, I’m an adult, Are you going to keep me hiding under my family’s wings forever? Cassie’s expression was fearless. “It’s time to show everyone what the Murphy family’s princess is really made of.”

After a moment of silence, Larry nodded respectfully. “Understood, Ms. Murphy.”

With that, he stepped out of the car. Instantly, chaos erupted outside.

Not far off, Jennie and her friends watched with crossed arms, intrigued. They knew Cassie was scared of reporters. With so many around her, they figured she must have been frightened to death in the car.

“Too bad we can’t witness her freak out,” Brianna said cheerfully

“Have you guys figured out how to write the story yet?” Jennie asked.

“Ms. Murphy is cold as ice and totally indifferent to her sister’s scandal-just goes to school like it’s no big deal. Brianna Laughed. “Something like that, I guess.”

“I also set up two social media accounts to spread the news about Cassie abusing’ Julia tomorrow,” another girl chimed in, sounding excited.

“This is what she gets for messing with us,” Jennie remarked, feeling pleased.

Jennie was convinced that Cassie wouldn’t dare confront the reporters and had prepared various news releases to take a serious shot at her.

But just then, she saw Larry step outside the car and lead the bodyguards as they cleared a space in the crowd.

“What are they doing?” Jennie’s smile faded.

“I have no idea.” Brianna looked just as confused.

The next moment, Larry opened the car door respectfully, and Cassie stepped out. The reporters went wild.

Is Cassie out of her mind? Brianna said, bewildered.

Jennie was completely at a loss for words. "This can't be real. How does Cassie have the guts to face the media?"

The reporters were shocked too, staring at the different
ut Cassie with blank faces.

"Ms. Murphy?" one reporter asked, his voice tinged with uncertainty.

"You guys have two minutes and three questions," Cassie said calmly, scanning the reporters before pointing at one. "You go first."

The chosen reporter was caught off guard.

"Why does he get to go first!" another reporter protested immediately.

Cassie looked at him, unfazed. "Because I'm the one being interviewed, and I make the rules."

The reporters were speechless as the bodyguards exchanged confused glances.

The chosen reporter soon regained his composure and asked, "Ms. Murphy, do you have any comments about the video. going around online involving Julia?"

"Nope. Cassie replied and pointed to another reporter. "Next question, something related to me."

The reporters were taken aback, and the bodyguards seemed equally stunned.

The designated reporter was shaken by Cassie's calm demeanor But as he had already prepared the questions, he collected. himself quickly and asked, "Ms. Murphy, some people are questioning your decision to come to school after such a big scandal with Julia. Isn't that a bit too flashy?"

Cassie stared at the reporter, expressionless. "I'm a student. Going to school is totally normal, isn't it? You can question me if I ever sk**p a class"

After that, she pointed to another reporter. "You ask the third question. Make it a good one."

The scene went silent, and the reporter who just asked the question looked completely off guard.

The third reporter jumped in quickly. "Ms. Murphy, please don't avoid the issue. We came here to help the public understand what's happening with Julia, and we need a clear answer from you."

Cassie turned to him. "Why should the public be snooping into the victim's life?"

The reporter hesitated for a moment, then pressed on. "Victim? Are you talking about Julia?"

Who else?" Cassie shot back.

Usually, celebrities were experts at dodging questions from reporters. Cassie's straightforwardness was quite rare.

"Since you all think the public deserves a response, here's mine. When something like this happens, your gossip can be a second injury to the victim." Cassie paused, looking straight into the camera. "Remember, no matter the situation or who the person is, the victim is never at fault."

With that, she turned and walked back to the car. The reporters paused and quickly tried to fire off more questions, but the bodyguards pushed them back. Cassie's car slowly pulled away from the school.

Larry sat in the passenger seat, still in shock. He occasionally glanced in the rearview mirror at Cassie, who sat upright with a calm demeanor, as if nothing had just happened.

"Ms. Murphy, Larry called gently,

"Turn right up ahead. I'm not going to the estate tonight. I'm heading home, Cassie replied, not looking up, her fingers flying over her phone.

"Got it..." Larry was still puzzled. Is turning eighteen really that magical? Can one just suddenly become an adult overnight?

The car cruised smoothly toward the Murphy residence. As they got closer, Cassie's phone buzzed, and she glanced down.

Codes flashed on the screen, then a chat window appeared, featuring Brianna and a reporter discussing how she planned to issue press releases targeting C**c.

A smick spread across Cassie's face. Seeing all those reporters at school had immediately made her think of Jennie and her clique. So, she whipped up a little something on her phone quickly, pretending it was an email about a new luxury product, and sent it to them.

Brianna was the first to open it. Cassie didn't hang around too long-she just wanted to confirm that the reporters presence was indeed linked to them. Then she swiped a few videos from Brianna's phone and sent them out to dozens of media outlets using an anonymous email

Cassie pulled those off as the car had rolled into the Murphy residence's garage.

Thanks for today. Larry. I'll call my grandpa to let him know I'm not coming over tonight. You can go rest," Cassie said cheerfully as she got out of the car, waving at him.

Larry, still a bit dazed, nodded and thought to himself, 'Man, eighteen really is something magical.

Julia was anxiously waiting for Cassie to return to the estate. Her phone was lighting up with messages, but today, none of them were about the video.

Julia, has Cassie lost it! She got into a fight with Jennie in class!]

[Julia, do you have two friends both named Cassie! The one who showed up today was totally different! She took down Jennie and her crew!]

[Julia, how are you feeling these days? By the way, can you tell me where Cassie got her surgery? She looks amazing-no signs of work done at all! Please, I need to know! Summer break is coming, and I have a friend wanting to get some work done, too!]

While the classmates bombarded her with messages, the usually lively class group chat was eerily silent today. Besides teachers assigning homework after class, no one else was saying word.

Julia was shocked. "How could Cassie have the guts to fight Jennie at school? Wasn't she the one who used to shake just hearing Jennie's name?" Figuring Cassie must be on her way back, Julia couldn't wait and headed to the living room.

As she went downstairs, she overheard Anne saying, "Is she not coming over? Can she really handle being home alone?" "Louisa already went over, Heston replied. "Anne, I just can't shake the feeling that something's off with her

"Yeah, she's been acting a bit different lately, Anne said, looking thoughtful.

Just then, Lucas rushed in from outside. He was usually relaxed, so seeing him like this was unusual.

"What's going on?" Anne asked, slightly concerned.

Lucas turned on the TV quickly while explaining, "Larry said Cassie gave an interview at the school entrance. They're airing

"What?" Hestor's eyes widened in shock.

"Since you all think the public deserves a response, here's mine. When something like this happens, your gossip can be a second injury to the victim."

“Remember, no matter the situation or who the person is, the victim is never at fault.”

As the TV turned on, the news had just reached Cassie’s powerful closing statement. The three of them, who had been anxious moments ago, were frozen, staring at the screen. There stood Cassie-her gaze strong and every word she spoke

resolute

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Julia stood on the staircase, staring in shock at the paused TV screen, where the calm, confident, and beautiful Cassie looking back at her felt like a stranger-how could it be the same girl she had always played with?

After a moment of confusion, anger and fear surged through Julia, I’m stuck in this mess, and she is out there flaunting n pain in front of reporters? No wonder she didn’t come back tonight. How could she face me after doing something so heartless?

Hurry up! Rewind it! I want to see what happened before. Fleston snapped back to reality and urged Lucas, who grabbed the remote and rewound the TV show.

After watching Cassie point at the reporters and deliver the killer responses, the three were stunned completely.

“Dad, am I seeing things? Was that my daughter confronting the media just now?” Lucas asked, bewildered.

“Of course. Who else could be so gorgeous? Heston’s voice burst with pride..

Even Anne, who typically didn’t react much to Cassie’s antics, found herself smiling slightly at Cassie on the screen.

Their reactions only fueled Julia’s anger. She gritted her teeth, turned on her heel, and headed upstairs.

Since Juha’s earlier video had sparked a huge discussion online, Cassie’s interview shot straight to the top of trending topics on major sites.

During the interview, Cassie didn’t say much. And with so many media outlets there-more than just haters-most of the footage shared online was the full interview, aside from a few out-of-context quotes.

As soon as the interview video dropped, conversations about re-traumatizing victims heated up online. As people naturally leaned toward defending the underdog, the tide turned in Cassie’s favor,

I never noticed before, but this girl is really impressive.]

[She looks so fresh today, Miss, can we tone down the crazy outfits?]

[The second reporter's question was hilarious! Ms. Murphy knows how to throw shade.]

[Let's respect victims' privacy. No more victim-blaming starts with me.]

Simon also caught Cassie's interview online. From the brief meeting yesterday, he could see how much she had transformed from the timid girl Julia described. She looked elegant and stunning, just like he imagined a high-society heiress would. Seeing her in the interview only impressed him more.

He realized that the Cassie Julia had talked up had been overly yllified. The real Cassie embodied the perfect wife he had always dreamed of. In stark contrast, Julia, showing her true colors these past few days, appeared increasingly unlikable.

Yesterday, Simon's desire to win Cassie had been sparked by experiencing real luxury, and today, getting to know the true. Cassie solidified that resolve further.

Just then, the door swung open. Simon switched off his phone quickly and shot an annoyed glance at Julia. "Could you ar Jeast knock first?"

"Maybe Cassie sensed something, Julia said, her mind racing with thoughts about Cassie's strange behavior, unaware of Simon's irritation.

Simon tensed up. "What do you mean by that? Did she say anything to you?"

"Can't you see she's totally different now? It feels like she's trying to avoid us. First, she went to school instead of coming home without telling me, and now she's not even coming back to the estate, Julia said in a low voice.

"She's not coming back tonight?" Simon frowned. He had heard Julia talk about Cassie's interests and had hoped to run into

her tonight, maybe get closer to her. Now it looked like that plan was falling apart.

"If she figures this out, our whole plan is toast," Julia said through clenched teeth..

"Not likely Simon's mood shifting to something darker.

Julia turned to him, frowning. "Any good idea?"

"It's preny simple. We just need to make it happen in advance, Simon said, word by word,

Julia blinked, surprised. "You wanna sleep with Cassie? The thought made her uncomfortable because she had feelings for

Simon

This is the quickest way to win Cassie over, Summon continued, pulling Julia into his embrace and whispering softly in her ear. "You know I can't stand her, but for our future, and to help your parents get revenge faster, I can make that sacrifice."

Juha's expression eased a bit. After all this plan had been hers from the beginning, and she had prepared herself for the possibility that Simon might get close to Cassie. Still, hearing Simon bring it up so suddenly felt unsettling

"Okay, it's better to wrap things up quickly. Everything lately has been super weird. We really need to get this sorted out fast,"

Julia said

Then she leaned against Simon's chest while wrapping her arms around his waist. "Simon, I was a bit too anxious the other day. Please don't hold it against me. I promise I'll give you my full support."

Simon suppressed his disgust and stroked Julia's hair gently. "How could I possibly hold that against you, silly? Let's leave the past behind. Now, we need to focus on making it a reality"

That's easy. I'll handle it, Julia smirked. Since they lived under the same roof, creating opportunities for Simon wouldn't be too difficult. But now that Cassie was back in town, she needed a plan to lure her back to the estate.

Heston called Cassie immediately after watching the interview. He started off by scolding her for not thinking about her safety. getting out of the car in a crowded place, and doing the interview without checking in with an adult. But then, he couldn't help but shower her with compliments.

Cassie sat in front of her computer, listening to Heston's cheerful voice on the other end. A mix of emotions swirled in her heart. It felt like ages since she heard Heston sound this happy-so long that she could hardly remember.

The call lasted over half an hour before it finally wrapped up. Cassie let out a long sigh and turned her attention back to the screen. She still had to finish her challenge for the hacker leaderboard from yesterday.

Just as she logged on under her alias, Xylo, the dark website's chat buzzed with excitement.

[Xylo is here!]

[Why did you show up so late? We thought you weren't coming! We've been waiting all day, boohoo.]

Xylo Had classes during the day. Just got home.]

Everyone was shocked. "What? The legendary hacker Xylo, who had just clawed their way from the bottom of the leaderboard to the top four in a single afternoon, is a student?"

Cassie ignored the flood of question marks and challenged the hacker ranked third without a second thought.

Yesterday, only the third-ranked hacker was online before Ca**ic logged off, but today all three top ones were there. It seemed they had all been waiting for her.

Once she initiated the challenge, the other party quickly accepted.

In the world of hacker rankings, challenges got much tougher once one made it into the top five-it turned into a fierce showdown

This battle continued until midnight. Ultimately, with Xylo's successful intrusion, Ca*ic rocketed up to third place in the world

The chat exploded. The hacker ranked third, Mike Miller, had won many international hacker competitions, making him one of the best in the game

Xylo, who are you really?!

Xylo [Just a regular computer w**z.]

The chat was flooded with questions again.

Xylo I need to prepare for some exams over the next few days, so I won't be online. Don't wait for me. Once exams are over. I'll challenge those in first and second place.

Meanwhile, across the ocean, Mike, just defeated, stared at the cheerful whack-a-mole game on his computer, utterly puzzled. His round face showed disbelief as he glanced at the two handsome guys across the table

One was Eric Anderson, who had a cute, doll-like face that looked innocent, while the other was Zayn Williams, with charming eyes and a playful, flirtatious vibe.

Eric. Zayn. I lost Mike could hardly believe it.

“Yeah, you lost, Eric nodded, feeling sorry for him.

Zayn, toying with a decorative ring on his finger, smiled, “This is interesting. It’s been a while since I’ve met someone like that. That little whack-a-mole seems cute. Xylo must be an adorable girl. If so, she doesn’t even need to challenge me-I’d just let her win

After that, he sighed. “I don’t want that cute little girl to cry because she lost to me.”

Zayn and Eric were currently ranked first and second. They had just watched Mike get schooled by Xylo in real-time.

Eric shot Zayn a look of exasperation. “Don’t act like she’s certain to lose. She’s pretty skillful.”

Just then, Mike cradled his head and let out a scream.

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“What’s going on?” Zayn’s eyebrow furrowed slightly.

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“I can’t believe I didn’t track her exact IP. I only have a rough location, Mike admitted, frustration edging his voice.

Where is she?” Eric and Zayn asked together.

“Seavity,” replied Mike.

The three exchanged looks, and Zayn chuckled, “What a coincidence. We’re fellow-townsmen.”

Eric and Mike fell into silence.

All three had come from wealthy families and had been sent abroad due to their embarrassed position in their families. They rarely went back to Seavity, so it was funny to hear Zayn refer to it as his hometown.

“Well, Eric and I are actually heading back soon. Maybe we’ll bump into this adorable computer w*z, Za**yn said, sounding genuinely intrigued by Xylo.

But Eric’s smile faded as Zayn mentioned their trip back. It was clear that he wasn’t looking forward to it.

Challenging top-tier players like Mike was draining. After shutting her computer, Cassie flopped onto her bed, completely

spent

She didn't push herself against those skilled hackers just for a ranking. She had a plan to help Murphy Group break into the internet industry, and she needed to find the best allies to make it happen.

Hackers didn't care about the company or anyone's social status. Most experienced hackers only valued skills. They were more likely to accept collaboration invites from those with stronger skills.

It was a bit late for Murphy Group to dive into the internet scene. To catch up with the competition, Cassie needed to recruit the strongest support.

That was why she was relentless in challenging top hackers. Only her identity as Xylo was recognized among hackers could she gain some influence.

Her phone buzzed non-stop. After a moment to collect herself. Cassie picked it up-it was Julia. It had been hours since Cassie started challenging Mike.

Before Cassie could say anything, Julia's furious voice blasted through "Cassie, you just went to school without a word, then you accepted a media interview, and now you didn't answer my calls or come back. What is going on with you?"

The angry questioning hit familiar notes. Cassie recalled countless times growing up when Julia had turned the tables on her.

Once, Julia broke Cassie's stuff and before Cassie could even cry, Julia would start wailing about how Cassie didn't take care of her things and how Heston would definitely punish Cassie if he found out

—And also, Julia used to say to Cassie, "Why did you ace the exam? I'm just an adopted kid. If I don't do as well as you, your family'll think I'm a failure and toss me aside."

There were a ton of memories like that. If Cassie really sat down to think about it, she could fill the night with stories. Julia, calm down. Honestly, I'm not sure how to face you right now, Cassie finally said.

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Julia suddenly fell silent. After a moment, she spoke up, "What do you mean? Did someone say something to you? You promised me you wouldn't listen to other people's gossip. It's clear someone is targeting me. Be smart, okay? Believing their lies is just making things worse for me."

"Wow, what a talker. If I didn't trust her, I'd be the fool and hurt her more, Cassie sneered silently as she replied, "No, it's not like that. No one told me anything

Then why did you say that?" Julia was confused. What is Cassie even thinking? I'm already on edge, and now she is freaking me out this late."

Julia, I get that you're the victim." Cassie said expressionlessly as she stretched her neck. "But I can't shake those images from that day. Every time I see you, all I think about are those terrible things. It's just hard for me."

Julia was stunned. So, she actually thinks I'm dirty?

"Just give me some time. Once I forget those images, we can go back to being friends," Cassie added.

She knew Julia must be angry now. But so what? Julia might not have a clue, but she knew all of Julia's weaknesses. And she could use any one of them to take a shot at Julia whenever she wanted.

"Are you disgusted by me?" Julia finally asked. Even through the phone, Cassie could feel Julia's anger boiling over.

Cassie should have comforted her right now. Instead, she hesitated for a few seconds on purpose before saying. "No, it's just that I've never seen anything so scary, so I'm feeling a bit shaken. It's not your fault. It's mine..."

Before Cassie could finish her pretentious words, Julia hung up.

Cassie raised an eyebrow and let out a sarcastic laugh. Tossing her phone aside, she decided to run a hot bath and get ready for a good night's sleep. Tomorrow, she'd start preparing for the big exam coming up.

Before middle school, Cassie and Julia went to different schools but both did well academically.

Once they hit the same high school, things changed. Cassie's grades always shined. Julia couldn't stand it and had tried everything to turn things around.

Cassie figured she must have been too pampered-almost like a saint in her previous life. Whenever Julia shed a few tears, Cassie would start writing random answers on her tests to bring down her grades, which had gone on until now.

Cassie had thought about trying to get back to normal, but every time she made an effort, Julia found some excuse to derail her. Luckily, all that madness had come to an end this time around.

In the dead of night, a sleek black car parked a short distance from the Murphy residence. Marcus sat behind the wheel, his long fingers casually resting on the steering wheel, staring out in Cassie's house's direction.

"Mr. Anderson, the security cameras in the alley behind the bar were down that night, so they didn't catch anything. But I can confirm that the location in the video is definitely that alley. The background music fits the tuning from that night Joe's voice echoed in Marcus' mind.

After a moment, Marcus tore his gaze away and grabbed his phone. As he unlocked it, a video started playing again. It was the clip of Cassie being interviewed earlier that day. He had lost count of how many times he had watched it since it first

came out

Cassie's changes in looks and personality were dramatic. But Marcus wasn't surprised. She had been a strong-willed girl when she was little. He just didn't know what had happened to her over the years.

Since that encounter in the bar alley, it felt like a switch had flipped inside Marcus. He found himself constantly coming up with reasons to see her. Yet, none of those reasons weighed as heavily as the one reason he couldn't see her

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He was treading a fine line. He couldn't let anyone discover that Cassie was his weakness. If they did, not only would he be at risk, Cassie would be too. That thought calmed the storm inside him, and the aura around him grew darker.

There had to be hidden threats behind what happened on the bar street that could endanger Cassie. He needed to act fast and deal with the enemies around him. Only then could he stand tall in front of Cassie and make it clear that he would protect her—anyone who dared to touch her would face serious consequences,

Julia spent the whole night tossing and turning, consumed by Cassie's words. The anger and hatred bubbling inside her were like a raging fire, burning away her reason

She thought to herself. See what I've become! Even the servants dared to look at me with disdain, and I didn't even dare to step outside the estate.

"But Cassie? In just one day, she has gone from a nobody to someone everyone admires—both at school and within the Murphy family.

I spent eight long years making her an ugly coward. And now, she turns everything upside down in just one day? Even Anne can't hide how much she likes Cassie. How is this possible? She doesn't deserve this!"

After a sleepless night, Julia got up to grab breakfast. She planned to casually let Cassie's family know about how Cassie looked down on her, letting them see Cassie's true colors.

As she walked downstairs to the dining room, Julia overheard Arine say, "You and Dad should head back today. I don't want Cassie alone at home. I barely slept last night worrying about her. I'll stay and keep Julia company."

Julia felt her anger rise. After everything I'd been through, Anne spent all night worrying about Cassie, who was safe and sound at home with tight security?

Anne was watching news about Cassie when a se*a**

"Yes," the se**t replied

Anne frowned in concern and headed straight for Julia's room, where the door was slightly ajar.

As Anne approached, she heard Julia's voice, broken and incredulous, saying, "Even if Cassie felt jealous about my closeness. with Anne, she wouldn't go so far as to drug me and have someone humiliate me. Please stop saying that. I refuse to believe