

Love Burned She Rose Unscathed Novel

Love Burned Chapter 1 - 10

Chapter 1

Everyone in the circle knew Roseanne Cole was head over heels for Murray Sherwood. She was so crazy about him, it was like she had no life outside of him, totally wrapped up in his world all the time.

Every time they broke up, it took less than three days for Roseanne to come crawling back, begging for reconciliation. Those words would never escape hers in a world where “let’s break up” seemed on everyone’s lips.

The room fell into an eerie silence for five seconds when Murray walked in with his new flame 8

Roseanne, in the middle of peeling an orange, stopped cold. “Why’s it so quiet in here? Why’s everyone staring at me?”

“Anne...” Her friends gave her worried glances 8

But Murray acted as if nothing was amiss, wrapping his arm around his woman and sitting on the couch. “Happy birthday, Cliff.”

He was so brazen and nonchalant.

Roseanne stood up. It was Cliff’s birthday, and she didn’t want to make a scene.}}

“Excuse me. I’m going to powder my nose.” she said.8

She closed the door behind her and could hear the conversation picking back up.

“Murray, Roseanne’s here. Didn’t I give you a heads–up? Why’d you bring her along?”

“Seriously, Murray, you’ve crossed the line this time.”

“It’s fine,” Murray loosened his grip on the woman’s waist and lit a cigarette, a smile playing on his lips, looking every bit the charming rogue.

The rest of the conversation was unclear as the door shut. Having regained the composure in the restroom and touched up the makeup, Roseanne looked at her reflection and curled her lips in disdain. "How pathetic."

Indeed, she was living a pathetic life 3

Taking a deep breath, Roseanne made up her mind. Yet, the scene greeting her as she pushed the door open and returned to the room made her grip the doorknob tightly, almost losing her composure.

Murray was pressing his lips against the woman's, their saliva moistening the napkin between them.

Laughter and cheers erupted around them.

"Damn, Murray is good at that?"}

"They're at it! They're at it!"

"The mood's set. Give us a show!"

Roseanne's hand on the doorknob trembled. That was the man she had loved for six years, and at that moment, she only felt bitter irony. "Hey, knock it off... Someone murmured, gesturing toward the door.

Everyone turned to look 8

"Anne, you're back? It's all in good fun. Don't take it to heart..."

But Murray cut him off, glancing over calmly. "Roseanne, since you're here today, let's lay everything out."

Roseanne nodded. "Sure, go ahead."8

Murray cut to the ch

chase. "We've been on and off for years, and to be honest, I'm just ti

tired of it. There's nothing left between us."

Roseanne clenched her fists, her nails digging into her palms, yet she felt no pain.

Huh! Six years of love had ended with, "There's nothing left between us."

Murray continued, "Millie's a great girl, and I want to make things official with her."

Roseanne numbly nodded. "Okay."

Murray looked at Roseanne. "Even though we break up, we're still friends. You can still call me if you need anything in Lumina City.")

"No need," Roseanne forced a smile, light as air. "If it's over, let's end it cleanly, to be fair to the lady."

Murray raised an eyebrow, seemingly surprised.

"Cliff, Roseanne turned to the birthday boy. "Happy birthday. I hope everyone enjoys themselves. I'm leaving now I peeled the plate of oranges on the table. Enjoy, and don't waste them.

Murray didn't like fruit, except for oranges. But he was picky, insisting on removing every piece of pith before he'd eat them.

Over the years, to ensure he had his daily fruit, Roseanne always meticulously peeled and cleaned the oranges, arranging them neatly on

a plate for him.

He'd hug her and coo, "My girlfriend's too good. God, what a lucky guy I am!"

Chapter 2

"Do you want to my wife?" He always knew what she wanted but never offered it freely.

Murray offered, "Til have my driver take you home."

"No need. I've called an Uber"

Cliff intervened, "Roseanne, let me walk you to the d

door."

Roseanne waved him off and turned to leave.⁸

"Murray, look at the mess... I think Roseanne is genuinely upset this time."⁸

"Nah, it's nothing."

"Exactly! How many times have they had a spat? And every time, Roseanne returned after a few days, acting like nothing was wrong at the next party.

"I bet five days "R

“I say six.”

Murray glanced at the door left ajar, his smile tinged with coldness. “I bet three hours tops. She’ll come running back to me.”

“Right, Murray’s a sure win. The whole world knows Roseanne is madly in love with him.”

“Man, why can’t any woman be that devoted to me?”

“You? Dream on, pals

The guys burst into laughter 8

Returning to the mansion past midnight, Roseanne took half an hour to pack.

She’d been there three years, but when she left, all her important stuff fit into just one suitcase

The walk-in closet was full of unworn designer clothes, the jewelry never worn, and she left it all behind.!

The only regret was the wall of professional books. Luckily, Roseanne had the content memorized. The medium was no longer significant.

Her gaze swept over the vanity, and she walked over to open a drawer. Inside was a check for seventy million dollars. Beneath the check was a contract for the property transfer at 72 Eastwood Acres.²

Despite being in the suburbs, it was conservatively worth twenty million. Murray signed both items during a previous breakup scare and tucked them away in the drawer, betting that Roseanne wouldn’t dare to take them. Because to take them would mean the end of their relationship.

Six years for seventy million? Suddenly, Roseanne felt it wasn’t a loss. How many women could claim their youth was worth t She packed both items into her bag

Roseanne thought, “Why not take what he gives me? Without love, at least there’s money.

She wasn’t some naive heroine from a romance novel who saw money as dir

“Hello, cleaning service? Do you take rush orders?”}

“Yes, a big clean-up. I’ll pay extra,”

Leaving the keys in the foyer, Roseanne got into the taxi, heading straight for her best friend's place.

On the way, the cleaning lady called again to confirm. "Are you sure you don't want to take any of this stuff with you?"

Roseanne replied, "Yeah, do whatever you see fit." }

that much?

After hanging up. Murray arrived home in the wee hours to find the cleaning lady had finished and left. The overpowering scent of perfume was giving him a headache. Loosening his collar, he sat on the couch, only to fall asleep there

The next day, he woke to the familiar clanking sound of the dishes in the kitchen. He sat up, rubbing his temples while reaching for his water glass, only to grab at thin air. His hand paused mid-air above the coffee table.

Then, he smirked slightly, thinking Roseanne had returned. The blanket was on him, but she hadn't prepared his hangover tea.

'She hasn't had enough of "incomplete confrontation" over the years, huh?' Murray thought and stood up. "Today, you'd better..."

"Mr. Sherwood, you're awake?" %

Murray looked surprised. "Sadie?" %

Sadie said respectfully, "Please freshen up. Breakfast will be ready in two minutes. Oh, were you cold sleeping here? I turned on the

Chapter 2

heating and added an extra blanket just in case." }

"Right."

Chapter 3

At the breakfast table, Murray frowned. "Where's the cereal?" ?

Sadie wasn't sure. "You mean the blueberry almond oatmeal?" -8

"Blueberry almond oatmeal?" Murray was curious.

Sadie added, “Yeah, the one Ms. Cole used to make with low-fat milk, frozen almonds, and blueberries, right? Oh, I didn’t have time to prepare that. Just freezing the almonds and blueberries takes a long time, and you must get up early to start making it.”

“And the proportion has to be just right. I don’t have Ms. Cole’s patience to do it accurately. It just wouldn’t taste the same. Also...”

Murray interrupted, “Get me some beef paste.”

“Coming right up, Mr. Sherwood.

“This doesn’t taste right.” Murray glanced at the jar. “And the packaging is off.”

Sadie explained, “That jar ran out. That is all we had.”

Murray ordered, “Grab a couple from the supermarket later and stock them at home.”

“We can’t find it there.” Sadie offered an awkward smile. “Ms. Cole used to make it herself, I don’t know how to...”

Crash!

Sadie asked, “Eh? Mr. Sherwood, you’re not eating?”

Murray scoffed, “Hmm, not in the mood.”

Sadie watched Murray ascend the stairs, utterly baffled, wondering why he suddenly lost his temper.

“Laziness incamate! Time to rise and shine!

Roseanne turned over, barely opening her eyes. “Quiet down. Let me sleep a bit more...”

With her makeup perfectly done, Leda Reynolds was choosing a purse. It’s almost eight. Don’t you have to rush back to make breakfast for Mr. Sherwood?

Roseanne sometimes spent the night, but she always rushed back home before dawn to whip up her blueberry almond oatmeal for Murray and his sensitive stomach.⁸

Leda found it ridiculous.⁸

Was Murray laid up or something? Couldn’t he just order some takeout on his phone?

It was all just spoiling him rotten!!

Deeply asleep, Roseanne brushed off the comment with a wave. “Not going back. We broke up.”

“Oh, planning to split for a few days, then? Leda teased. Then sleep well. Breakfast is on the table. Im off to work, I have a date tonight, so you don’t need to cook for me. You’ll probably head back soon anyway. Could you close the balcony window on your way out?”²

Roseanne woke up hungry. Munching on her best friend’s sandwich, she gazed at the brilliant sunshine, struggling to recall the last time she woke up naturally.

After finishing her brunch, she changed and headed straight for the bank to cash a check for fifty million. It was always safer to have the money in hand ⁸

“I

with

Then, she visited the bank next door. “I need to speak with your private banking advisor. I want to deposit ten million.”

The branch manager offered a decent annual interest rate. Roseanne negotiated for an additional two percentage points, reaching a satisfactory agreement. Following the same strategy, she deposited ten million in two other banks, negotiating better rates each time. When exiting the last bank, Roseanne was a millionaire, armed with three black cards, thirty million dollars in deposits, and twenty million in liquid assets.

“Not a bad split,” she thought, having essentially struck gold overnight.

Passing by a bustling hair salon, Roseanne walked in, She instantly splurged on a two–thousand–dollar membership for VIP service. Sitting in front of the mirror Roseanne looked at her brown, wavy hair and felt a tinge of disdain for the first time.!!

The hairdresser praised, “Darling, your hair’s fantastic, like a doll’s...”

She kept her hair long and wavy because Murry loved the feel of it, especially the atmospheric vibe it gave off after their intimate moments. But maintaining beautiful curls meant dedicating even more time to grooming.

Chapter 4

Roseanne smiled at the hairdresser, “Please, cut it short and straighten it.”

‘Even the prettiest doll is just a toy. Roseanne decided, ‘Let whoever wants to play with it, I’m done playing ‘⁸

Stepping out of the hair salon, Roseanne felt a sense of liberation wash over her. Conveniently, there was a sales promotion at the Uniqlo store next door. She popped in and picked out a white tee and a pair of jeans, changing into them right there. They matched her sneakers perfectly.

As she wandered, she arrived outside the gates of Kingswell University, watching students cycle in and out under the setting sun. She paused, lost in thought

“Carlisle! Over here!” A young man brushed past Roseanne. “What’s everyone doing here?”

“We’re planning to visit Ms. Payne, so…”

Carlisle frowned. “With this many people, the hospital won’t allow it. Let’s do this. Only two representatives from the bioinformatics. department will come with me.”

Bioinformatics? Ms. Payne? Roseanne’s gaze sha

sharpened, and she quickly stepped forward. “Who did you say

y was sick?!”

Carlisle stuttered, caught off guard by the neat and pretty girl before him. “Um, Ms. Payne.””

Roseanne asked again, “Madeleine Payne?”

Carlisle nodded. “Yeah,

“Which hospital?”

“Serenity Health Hospital

“Thanks.

Carlisle called out to Roseanne’s back. “Uh… which department are you from? Are you also one of Ms. Payne’s students?”?

Roseanne left his question hanging as she strode away.

Back at her apartment. Roseanne couldn’t shake off the unease. Was Madeleine, the one who’d tap someone on the head when annoyed, actually sick? How serious was
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Roseanne opened her contacts, hesitating over Madeleine’s before deciding against calling.

Back then, for the sake of so-called love, she had abandoned the opportunity for a direct Ph.D. program to be with Murray. She hadn't worked a single day after undergrad, making herself a housewife revolving around her man.

Madeleine must have been really let down

"Huh? Anne, you didn't go back?" Changing her shoes, Leda was surprised

Roseanne's mouth twitched. "What, you want to kick me
ne out?"

"Wow, you're sticking it out this time. I remember the last time you and Murray broke up, it took him less than half an hour to call you back, and you went straight back to him."

up in the pot. Help yourself."

Roseanne changed the subject. "There's soup

Leda's eyes lit up, and she hurried into the kitchen for the soup, sipping it appreciatively. "Murray's such a lucky dog. getting to have this every day..

to bed."2

Roseanne cut in. "Remember to wash the dishes and clean up. I'm going to

Leda pressed again, "Hey, you're not going back?"

The answer

was a closed bedroom door!

Leda clicked her tongue. "She's finally standing her ground..."

Elsewhere under the same night sky, at Seaview Estate.

*Mr. Sherwood, the bank has confirmed that Ms. Cole personally cashed the fifty million at 12:05 PM today...

Murray hung up, staring coldly at the night view outside the window. "Roseanne, what new game are you playing?"

If she thought it would win Murray back, she was sorely mistaken. There was no turning back on his decisions.

"Cliff, fancy a drink?"

Half an hour later, Murray pushed open the lounge door, and Cliff greeted him with a smile. "Murray, everyone's here, just waiting on you. What are we drinking tonight?"

Murray walked in, paying him no mind

Chapter 4

Cliff paused, looking behind him. "What's up? Isn't Roseanne coming? Is she parking?"

Murray's expression darkened.

Chapter 5

"Having trouble finding a parking spot? Let me go help..."

Whoops! Cliff finally realized, noticing the displeased expression on Murray's face. "Ahem! Murray, Roseanne hasn't come back yet, has she?"

It had been over three hours.

Murray spread his hands and shrugged. "Come back? You think breaking up is a joke?"

With that, he walked past Cliff and sat on the couch.

Cliff scratched his head. Could it be? But soon enough, he shook his head, feeling he was overthinking it. If anyone could make a clean break, it was Murray, but not Roseanne. Of all the women who might agree to a breakup, Roseanne wouldn't. That was a well-known fact in their circle.

"Murray, why are you alone?" Never one to avoid stinging the pot, York Gibson folded his arms with a smirk. "You bet three hours, and now it's been a whole day."

Murray smirked, "A bet's a bet. What's the penalty?"

York raised an eyebrow, "Let's switch it up today. No drinking."

Murray was stunned to hear that. "

York challenged, "I dare you to call Anne and say in the sweetest voice. I'm sorry. I was wrong. I love you." }

Laughter erupted around them.

Cliff couldn't resist and snatched Murray's phone to dial Roseanne.}_

After a few rings, "Sorry, the number you have dialed is currently unavailable"!

"Is Roseanne blocking me? A hint of surprise flashed across Murmy's face.

The laughter around them gradually faded as everyone exchanged puzzled looks."

Cliff immediately hung up, returning the phone while trying to cover "Or, maybe Roseanne is unavailable. Roseanne is blocking Murray. huh? Only if the pig can fly."

Even Cliff felt awkward by the end of his sentence.⁸

York pondered. "Maybe Anne's serious this time.

Murray scoffed, "Breakups are real. Are they supposed to be fake? I'm not playing this game a second time. Mention Roseanne again, and you're no brother of mine.

York's eyes narrowed, and after a moment, he said, "Just don't regret it.")

Murray's lips curled in disdain. He never regretted his actions.

Seeing the tension, Corley Sullivan quickly tried to lighten the mood. "Hey, let's lighten up, everyone. We're all buddies here..."

It was 7 am. Leda finished her morning run and entered the house, immediately greeted by the aroma of breakfast?

slim and straight

Holding a steaming bowl of oatmeal, Roseanne emerged from the kitchen in a houndstooth dress that showcased her s legs. Even without makeup, she was stunningly beautiful.

"Go shower. Breakfast is ready when you are."

Surprised, Leda remarked, "A new hairstyle? Brown, straight, and in a high ponytail? All dolled up, and you are planning to go back? Or is Murray coming to pick you up?!"

Roseanne rolled her eyes at Leda. "Oh, please. Can't you wish me well for once?"

"If Murray's coming over isn't that wishing you well?" Leda approached the breakfast table, amazed by the spread."

"Go take a shower, Roseanne swatted away her hand. "You smell bad.

Leda protested, "What about double standards? You never hit Murray when he does that."

Roseanne looked calm. “Hmm, next time, if there’s a chance, I will.”³

“Yeah, right...” After Leda showered, Roseanne was already leaving with a lunchbox. Tsk, making breakfast for me and still remembers to pack something for her man. Talk about priorities...²

A voice sounded in a private room at Serenity Health Hospital. “Madeleine, how are you feeling today?”

Madeleine set aside her paper and adjusted her reading glasses. “Hans? What are you doing here?”

“Easy, don’t move, Hans Olson quickly propped a pillow behind her. “Your stitches haven’t healed yet.”

Madeleine sighed. “Appendicitis, minor surgery. Recovery’s just slower ‘cause of my age, so they’re keeping me here longer. Oh, by the way, have they posted this year’s grad program admission quotas yet?”

Hans nodded immediately. “Yes, you get three slots, and I get four.”

“Three, huh... Madeleine muttered.

“What, were you planning on taking only two again this year?” Hans was curious.

Chapter 6

Madeleine admitted it. “Yeah, I’m getting old. I can only guide two,”

Hans mumbled, his lips curling in a moue of discontent. It was evident the third slot was for Madeleine, yet she would not admit it outright.²

“Ms. Payne. Oh? Mr. Olson is here, too?” Carlisle strolled in with two younger students, setting down a bouquet of fresh sunflowers on the table. “We’re just here to check on Ms. Payne.

Amidst the casual conversation, one of the students mentioned, “I heard a freshman this year is brilliant. Got straight into the combined Bachelor–Master–PhD track.”⁸

At Kingswell University’s School of Life Sciences, it’d been almost a decade since anyone got into the direct PhD track from undergrad, and no more than three students had managed it

“This freshman won gold at the International Mathematical Olympiad and the International Informatics Olympiad last year, securing her spot in our department. T

“Two gold medals? That’s pretty cool. But I remember a senior. She must have been one of Ms. Payne’s students, who entered undergrad with four gold medals, one in math, physics, chemistry, and computer science each! What was her name? Rose or something like Anne?” “Looks like it’s about time!” Hans interjected, “You guys should head back to campus.”

“Oh, alright then. We’ll be off.

“Yeah,”

Once the students had left the room, the one who had brought up the senior looked visibly downcast. “Carlisle, did I say something wrong? Ms. Payne and Mr. Olson seemed upset.”

Carlisle looked equally puzzled.

Back inside the room, Hans said, “Those students didn’t mean any harm. Don’t overthink it”

Madeleine waved him off, but her lips trembled uncontrollably, and tears began to well up in her eyes, eventually spilling over. “She was such a genius. She shouldn’t have... Why didn’t she value her gifts?”

“Take it easy...” Hans tried to console her!

“Hans, do you know what she said to me the last time we met? She said she wanted love. Hah, she wanted love? She broke my heart...” Outside the room, Roseanne stood with the lunchbox in hand, her tears flowing freely

I’m sorry... Ms. Payne

Ultimately, she couldn’t muster the courage to enter, leaving the lunchbox at the nurses’ station. “This is for Ms. Payne. Could you please give it to her? Thanks“}

The nurse called out to her. “Hey, you haven’t left your details! Why the rush?”

Roseanne ran out of the hospital building, gasping for the fresh air, but the overwhelming guilt lingered

“Roseanne?” A tall woman with flawless makeup approached her, her heels clicking on the pavement, swinging a classic Chanel bag

She embodied sophistication in a blazer and pencil skirt, her hair cascading over her shoulders. It was Hertha Sherwood, Murray’s younger sister.

“Roseanne? Why aren’t you at home? What brings you to the hospital?” Hertha glanced at the building. The general ward was not for maternity check-ups.

Hertha breathed a sigh of relief for her mother. If Roseanne were pregnant, an emergency wedding would have Beverley Sherwood furning.

“Hertha,” Roseanne managed a weak smile.!

Hertha noticed it. “Why are your eyes so red? Have you been crying?”

Roseanne remained silent.

“Another fight with my brother?”

“No.”%

Hertha figured Roseanne was just being stubborn, looking at her with sympathetic eyes.

She was fond of Roseanne, who was both pretty and had a great personality. But Roseanne wasn’t good enough to meet the Sherwood family’s standards since Beverley valued academic achievements, preferring a high-caliber scholar as her daughter-in-law.

Hertha smiled. “Being with my brother is exhausting, right? He’s not easy to deal with. Bear with him.”}}

старшер

Roseanne murmured, “We’ve split...”

“Anyway, I’ve got things to do, can’t stay and chat.” With that, Hertha glanced at her watch and headed back inside.”

Hertha was there to visit Madeleine, having heard she favored bright and diligent students. And she had dressed up specially for the occasion. Whether she could secure that direct PhD spot was up in the air.!!

Chapter 7

The previous night was a bit out of hand. Cliff insisted on keeping the party going even after they’d all had more than enough.

When the driver dropped Murray off at his mansion, dawn was breaking. He had barely crashed onto his bed, the wave of sleepiness overwhelming, but he forced himself to stagger to the bathroom for a quick shower”

“Maybe Roseanne won’t chew me out?” in his groggy state, Murray wondered.

He woke up again, this time to pain.

“Damn...” he groaned, clutching his stomach as he rolled out of bed.

“My stomach is killing me! Anne...” He stopped mid-sentence, a frown creasing his brow. Roseanne held a grudge this time, more than in their last fight.

‘Fine, let’s see how long she can keep this up. But where are the meds? Murray ransacked the living room, checking every possible storage space, but couldn’t find the emergency medicine kit.

He called Sadie.

Sadie answered the phone. “You’re looking for antacids? They’re in the medicine box.”

Murray’s temples throbbed as he took a deep breath. “And where is that?”

Sadie added. “In the drawer in your bedroom’s walk-in closet. Ms. Cole said you often have stomach issues after drinking, so she ensured to stock up and keep it close by...Hello? Are you still there? Why’d you hang up...”

Sure enough, Murray found the medicine box in the drawer, stocked with his usual array of stomach remedies. After he took the medicine and felt the pain subside, his tense nerves relaxed.⁸

As he pushed the drawer back in place, something caught his eye. All of Roseanne’s jewelry, designer bags, and everything was still there except for all her documents like her ID, passport, and diplomas. Everything was gone. And one of the suitcases that was usually in the corner was missing, too.

Murray stood frozen, rage bubbling up inside him.

“Great... just great...” He muttered several times, sarcastically nodding as he did so.

Murray cursed silently. The more you pamper women, the bigger their egos swell,

Just then, he heard the front door open. Murray immediately headed downstairs. “What are you doing here??”

Hertha was taking off her shoes, looking up in surprise. “Who else were you expecting?”

Murray sat lazily on the sofa, uninterested. “What do you want? Something urgent?”

“Heard you were having stomach issues again. So, here I am, sent by our dear mom to check on my beloved brother.” As she spoke, Hertha headed toward the kitchen, “I haven’t had lunch yet and figured I might as well crash here.”

Another reason she had a good impression of Roseanne was her cooking skills

But within half a minute, she asked curiously, “Murray, why does it look like a ghost kitchen here? Where’s Roseanne? Isn’t she home today? That’s odd.

Usually, by this time, Roseanne would have prepared a meal, waiting for Murray to come down, and if luck were on Hertha’s side, she’d get to join in.

He heard Roseanne’s name again. Murray massaged his temples, wishing to be left alone.

Disappointed, Hertha emerged from the kitchen. “Is Roseanne feeling unwell? I saw her at the hospital yesterday, and she looked pale...”

“You saw her at the hospital?” Murray straightened up a bit.

Hertha nodded immediately. “Yeah, I was visiting Ms. Payne at Serenity Health Hospital and bumped into Roseanne at the entrance. And guess what, Murray? Ms. Payne agreed to consider me for a direct PhD position!”

He frowned. “Why was Roseanne at the hospital?”

Hertha retorted impatiently. “How would I know? If you’re clueless, how am I supposed to have any idea?”

Murray stayed silent.

“She might not be sick herself. Maybe she was visiting someone? But I’ve never heard of Roseanne having friends. Her life is all about you, and then you again,

Murray cut her off. “Are you done?”

Hertha let out a surprised “Huh.”

“If you finish talking, please leave. I need more sleep.” Murray stood up.

“I mean... are you kicking me out? Fine, I’m leaving.” Hertha grumbled as she put on her shoes, “I didn’t come here without a reason today.

Chapter 8

Murray had no desire to stick around for another lecture. He made a beeline for the st

stairs, tuning out the noise.!

Hertha called out to him. "Tomorrow, 2 PM, at Thyme & Seasons. Mom's set you up on a blind date. Don't be late!"

"Cut the crap," Murray said without looking back

Hertha stuck her tongue out at Murray's retreating figure before she finally left. She was well-versed in this routine. After all, sneaking around with Roseanne didn't clash with meeting potential matches her mom approved.

Murray had been dragged into these setups for years, mostly just going through the motions to appease

After shooing Hertha away, Murray retreated to his home office to tackle some company work.

e their mother

He had ventured out on his years ago, eager to break free from the family's clutches. The first three years were a struggle without their help, with only Roseanne by his side. Only in the recent two years, he had finally made a name for himself and his company, shaking off the "rich kid" and "playboy" labels.

As Murray's success grew, his family's attitude softened, moving from outright opposition to his relationship with Roseanne to a begrudging acceptance.

After wrapping up his work, Murray realized the sun had set. The evening lights were on, and he felt the pangs of hunger.

He picked up his phone and called his girlfriend, "Hey, what's up?%"

Her voice was a whisper on the other end. "Babe, sorry, I'm in class. I'll come see you afterward, okay?"

The way she said "Babe" made Murray's skin crawl. "Yeah, sure. You do you," he said before abruptly hanging up and tossing his phone aside.

A call came in moments later, but Murray ignored it, focusing on his work until his stomach protested loudly.

He texted Cliff and the gang to grab dinner. Then he changed his clothes and was about to head out when he noticed a girl sitting by the door, who jumped up at the sound, turning with a shy, bright smile §

Murray was surprised. "Millie?"%

“Sorry, I knocked, but you didn’t hear. So, I waited Millie said, glancing at the blazer draped over his arm. “Heading out?”

Murray frowned, not answering her question but asking, “How did you find this place?”

Millie looked a bit guilty. “I asked a friend...”

“Cliff?”

“No. York “B

Murray sighed. “Come in first.”}

Millie’s face lit up with a smile as she bounced inside, taking in her surroundings while playfully complaining. “You hung up and didn’t answer my calls. I’m so worried...”

Murray cut her off. “Weren’t you supposed to be in cla
class?

1 skipped. You’re more important,” Millie grinned.

Roseanne would never do something like that. When he pursued her,

er, she was just a freshman with a heavy course load, never skipping class for him. Roseanne found time for him after they got together, and her schedule lightened up in her senior year.

Millie tried to say something. “Hey, have you eaten yet? I could...”

“Do you know how to make Blueberry almond oatmeal?” Murray asked out of the blue.

Millie was confused. “Blueberry almond oatmeal?”

“Yeah.”

Millie tried to please Murray. “No, but I can learn, “8

After declining Millie’s hint at staying the night, Murray ate the takeout she brought and drove her back to her dorm. Then he headed out to meet Cliff and the others.³

He glanced at his phone at a stoplight, remembering Hertha mentioning she saw Roseanne at the hospital earlier that day. Even though they had broken up, the affection lingered. As a friend, he felt he should check on her.?

He opened his messaging app. [Are you sick?]

[You are not friends with R.C. Please send a
da friend request to continue]

Chapter 9

“What’s up with Murray?” Cliff glanced at the man drowning his sorrows in scotch, quietly sliding closer to York.

When they entered, Murray had been sporting a glower that could kill. The lively buzz of the party had noticeably dimmed.

“Somebody got blocked,” Ever the instigator, York couldn’t help but add fuel to the fire, reveling in the drama!!

Murray’s face darkened even more at the words.

Crash! He slammed down his wine glass on the glass table, his frustration palpable as he roughly undid the top buttons of his shirt, a hint of aggression in his movements. “I said, stop mentioning her. Can’t you understand what I said?”

York just shrugged, opting to stay silent.

The mood shifted instantly. The singers fell silent, and the chatter around them died down, nobody daring to speak up.

Cliff almost choked on his drink. Roseanne was seriously not messing around, huh?||

A bit tipsy, Corley leaned in and whispered to Cliff, “Did Roseanne come back yet?”)

Cliff just shook his head and mumbled something noncommittal, not daring to say much.

Corley got the hint, guessing Roseanne probably hadn’t returned yet.

The bartender delivered another round, and feeling brave, someone suggested, “How about a game of Truth or Dare?”

Everyone quickly caught on, eager to lighten the mood and avoid further awkwardness.

“I love Truth or Dare, announced a woman who had just walked in.

“Janie, over here. We’ve got a spot by Murray.”

She got nudged to sit beside Murray, the club’s star attraction and no stranger to keeping Murray company

“Mr. Sherwood...”

Murray suddenly stood up, obviously disinterested. “Have fun, you guys. I’m out of here.

He left behind a group of stunned faces and a Janie, who had lost out on a lucrative night

Exiting the bar, the driver asked Murray where to go next!

Having downed a few glasses of brandy, Murray felt his head spinning.

Thinking of the empty mansion, he muttered, “To the office.”

ready to leave, was surprised to see Murray stepping out of

“Mr. Sherwood? What brings you here?” It was ten at night, and the assistant, ready the elevator!

The assistant’s astonishment only added to Murray’s irritation. Usually, Roseanne would nag him about his irregular schedule around this time, playfully demanding he go to bed early. Despite his protests, he’d usually give in and lay down.

Murray said coldly. “Wrapping up for the day?!”

The assistant answered humbly, “Yes, Mr. Sherwood. Anything else you need?”

Murray wanted to dismiss her but felt a pang of hunger and the alcohol stirring uncomfortably in his stomach. He turned pale. “Could you get me some soup? From the best place around.

The assistant was fast and came back within twenty minutes with a beautifully packaged meal.

But upon opening it, he couldn’t hide his displeasure. “Why is it clam chowder?”;

The assistant looked confused. “The Golden Fork’s signature dish is their clam chowder, Mr. Sherwood...”

Murray interrupted the assistant abruptly, “Forget it. Just leave.”

The clam chowder was rich in aroma and flavor, tasting light and refreshing. Yet, after a few sips, Murray’s appetite vanished. Murray found himself missing the simple meals Roseanne used to whip up.

“Damn it!” He was going crazy.

e light switch and heard the sound of heavy bre

After returning to her apartment from the hospital, Roseanne flicked on the lights. With the lights glaring, she caught Leda in a skimpy silk nightgown, entangled with a young man on the sofa

heavy breathing.”

Their hands roamed freely, his shirt slightly lifted to reveal a toned abdomen, as they exchanged passionate bites and kisses, Leda's neck marked with evidence of their passion. The atmosphere was thick with unspoken desires, and the scene revealed implied intimacy.

Chapter 10

Leda was momentarily dazzled by the lights, her face a picture of confusion as she instinctively pushed the man away before he could land a kiss. “Whoa, Anne, you're back.”

“Ahem! Uh, maybe you two should get dressed first.” Roseanne's lips twitched slightly, politely turning her back to give them privacy.

She sighed. It looked like her stay at Leda's place might be over. Even the best of friends needed their privacy. Living together for too long was inconvenient for each other.

However, Leda seemed unbothered by the recent interruption. She casually pulled up her slipping strap, draped a jacket over her shoulders, and tossed the man's blazer back to him.

Leda left a lipstick mark on his handsome face, and the man's eyes were still red. Leda patted his cheek comfortingly, “Sweetie, wait for me in the bedroom.”

Eager to comply, the man picked up his clothes, barely covering his chest, his shoulders full of love bites, and gave Roseanne a cheerful smile. “Hey, Anne, good evening.

Roseanne instinctively responded, “Hi, Keven.”

The man chuckled and disappeared into the room.

Leda poured herself a glass of red wine, savoring the sweet yet slightly bitter taste, and sighed contentedly before correcting Roseanne, “This one's Steven, not Keven.”

Roseanne was at a loss for words!

“Where have you been? It’s late,” Leda noticed Roseanne’s reddened eyes and frowned, “Have you been crying?”²

Roseanne got herself some water, her mind elsewhere. “I went to visit Ms. Payne at the hospital today.”

The two were college classmates and both Madeleine’s students. Leda was still active in the university group chat and had heard about

She glanced at Roseanne. “You…”

She hesitated to continue. Back then, Roseanne was Madeleine’s star pupil. Not everyone knew, but as her closest friend and roommate, Leda had seen the professor give Roseanne special attention, including project opportunities and co-authoring papers.

Considering Roseanne was just an undergraduate and Madeleine wasn’t even officially her advisor, the resources she was willing to share were significant. According to Madeleine’s plan, Roseanne could have been the country’s youngest biosciences PhD within five years.

Till then, Leda couldn’t understand why Roseanne would give up her studies. Remembering the teacher’s favoritism, Leda couldn’t help but think that some people didn’t value what comes too effortlessly. After all, geniuses have the privilege to be capricious.

“How’s Ms. Payne recovering after the surgery? Leda asked.

Roseanne shook her head.

Leda laughed, albeit frustratedly. “How did you even visit without knowing anything about her condition?”

Roseanne murmured, “I didn’t dare go in.”

“Seriously? That scared?” Leda couldn’t help but tease, seeing Roseanne’s expression. “You had it coming!”

Roseanne’s eyelashes fluttered, but she remained silent.

Leda realized the morning’s food was all intended for Madeleine.

Leda asked again, “Do you plan to keep avoiding this?”

Roseanne was usually bold and decisive but seemed too scared to show her face.

Roseanne regained some composure. "Sooner or later, I have to face Ms. Payne. There are some people and issues that I can't deal with by running away."

Then, she looked up. "Leda, would you come with me to see Ms. Payne?"

Leda sat straight. "What are you planning?"