

Messing With Her? Are You Crazy!

Didn't that make her look like a complete clown?

The sheer humiliation sent a chill through Isabella, making her tremble and her breath catch in her throat.

Just as the two figures were disappearing around the corner.

She thought she saw... a familiar, tall and imposing figure walking up to Serena's side.

He naturally fell into step with Serena and Mr. Harrison.

But it was only for a second, so fast that... she almost wondered if she'd imagined it.

Nicholas?

Why would Nicholas be at the institute, and walking with Serena and the others?

No... that's not right!

She must have been mistaken. She'd heard his car at the Lancaster estate several times but hadn't seen him. She missed him so much, she must have been seeing things.

But even if she was wrong about Nicholas...

What about Mr. Harrison's attitude toward Serena? And how did Serena get into the institute in the first place?

Isabella felt as if everything she had ever been proud of was being crushed to dust before Serena.

Her pride was in pieces.

"Impossible... this is absolutely impossible..." Isabella murmured, a dazed look on her face.

"Isabella..." Ian's face was grim. He remembered how he had just been bragging in front of two beautiful women about how impressive he was, only to be slapped in the face by the very person he'd dismissed as a nobody.

His eyes darted around before he placed a hand on Isabella's shoulder. "You wait here. I'll go in and check out the situation, see what kind of trick that woman used to get into the institute."

With that, Ian started to walk inside.

But as he tried to pass through the security gate, he was stopped.

Two guards from the Department of Defense crossed their rifles, blocking his path.

Ian pulled out his ID card. "I'm a researcher here! Why are you stopping me?"

The guards' expressions remained unchanged. "Your access to the institute has been revoked. If you

have any questions, please

contact

your superior to file a report."

Ian's face went pale, then red. It was the height of humiliation.

Especially when his passing

colleagues cast strange glances his looking at

him as if he were

way

part of a circus act.

Ian felt like he was on pins and needles. He had never been so embarrassed.

Isabella's eyes widened in shock. Her first thought was...

Serena was behind Ian's access being revoked!

But she couldn't believe it. How could Serena possibly have that much power?

Could it be that her parents, or her

gran just to

pressured Mr. Harrison

let Serena in just to please her?

Amish Serena's reputation?"

Because Serena, that country bumpkin who didn't even graduate high school, was a

total slacker who hated school.

So, the family must have used their connection to Mr. Harrison to get Serena a place in his institute...

Once she was associated with Mr. Harrison's institute.

Even without a diploma, no one in Vaelion City's high society could mock her for her lack of education.

The more Isabella thought about it, the more convinced she became!

Her perfectly manicured nails dug into her palms, her crimson eyes fixed on the corner where Serena had disappeared.

She was going to see...

Just how far the Lancaster family was willing to go for Serena!

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Time ticked by in a high-stakes battle of offense and defense.

Eleven o'clock at night.

Inside the central control room, the final source of the attack was lured out, isolated, and eliminated by Serena!

Project Aegis's core data was restored and reinforced, and its defense system was upgraded to a whole new level.

Everyone felt like they had just won a major battle. After working around the clock for over twenty hours, they were exhausted but buzzing with adrenaline.

"The targets have been apprehended and taken to a Department of Defense holding facility. We should have more information tomorrow after the interrogation," Mr. Harrison announced, putting down his phone. His face was glowing with excitement as he shared the good news.

Earlier that morning, Serena had located the attackers' base and relayed the information to the Department of Defense for a raid.

But the enemy had reacted too quickly. By the time the agents arrived, the place was deserted, with nothing left but dozens of destroyed computers.

Experts tried to recover the data, but the drives were completely wiped, leaving no clues.

As a result, the attackers quickly relocated that afternoon. However, they hadn't given up on "Project Aegis," a core Elyndor project.

They regrouped, adjusted their strategy, and launched another small-scale probe. But that probe was all it took.

Serena quietly tracked them once again, successfully pinpointing their new location.

Mr. Harrison looked at Serena, his eyes full of excitement. "The Department of Defense told me that when those guys were arrested, they kept asking who Elyndor's master hacker was, how we breached their firewall, and what went wrong."

"You and Mr. Blackwood worked together perfectly. The other side was completely helpless!"

Serena placed her laptop back into her canvas bag and stood up. "It was a team effort. I've already set up a new firewall and taught everyone how to update and maintain it, as well as how to patch any vulnerabilities."

Mr. Harrison nodded repeatedly, grinning from ear to ear.

Serena glanced around the control room but didn't see Nicholas.

"Are you looking for Mr. Blackwood? He just went over to the main console to reinforce its firewall. He should be back in a bit..." Mr. Harrison saw right through her.

Serena's long, dark lashes fluttered for a moment. She replied coolly, feigning indifference, "I wasn't looking for him."

With that, she walked out of the control room.

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Mr. Harrison watched her go and couldn't help but chuckle before following her. "Serena, speaking of which that final trace disruption you did your approach was simply..."

As he was talking.

A figure suddenly rushed toward the control room door.

He was wearing a plaid shirt, his hair was a mess, and his bloodshot eyes were

fixed on Serena.

"You... you actually, really..."

It was Tyler.

The

cer who had doubted

Serena that morning and had left

room early, afraid of eft

held responsible for the failure.

He had been waiting to see Serena make a fool of herself.

He thought, how could some young girl who was barely an adult be more capable than a group of super-gemuses like them who were born with a silver spoon in their mouths and a head start on ordinary people?

But he waited and waited.

Serena never failed.

Instead...

He heard them say that Project Aegis's core data had been fully restored and that

an even stronger firewall had been built.

He had actually rushed over that afternoon.

But to his shock, his access to the control room had been revoked!

At that time, everyone was busy at their stations, and he couldn't get to Mr.

Harrison. He could only wait anxiously at the door.

He watched Mr. Harrison trot eagerly behind the young woman, excitedly discussing technical jargon with her.

Meanwhile, the young woman remained calm and composed, one hand in her pocket, carrying herself like a true master.

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Tyler's heart sank.

What had he missed?

This was a golden opportunity to serve the country, a chance to add another prestigious accomplishment to his name!

Without a doubt, everyone in the control room today would have this experience added to their list of accolades; they would all receive national commendation.

"Mr. Carter, you should go home and rest," Mr. Harrison said, frowning. His tone was cold.

He had, of course, heard about what happened that morning.

His institute had no need for a researcher who was so arrogant and had such poor judgment.

The instruction to "go home and rest" had a deeper meaning, and Tyler understood it perfectly.

Go home and rest, and don't bother coming back.

Tyler clenched his fists, his face a mask of desperation. "Mr. Harrison, I was wrong. After this... I'll never judge a book by its cover again!"

Mr. Harrison waved a dismissive hand and, without another word, turned to escort Serena away.

Tyler rushed to block their path. "Mr. Harrison, I've been at the institute for so many years! I've put in years of hard work, even if I don't have major accomplishments. You can't... you can't just fire me over something so minor! I've... I've already been punished, haven't I?"

The Elyndor Institute of Advanced Sciences was the top energy research facility in the entire country, led by the national treasure, Mr. Harrison.

Just being associated with the institute gave you status. Even a dog from the institute was respected outside.

If he was kicked out.

No other institute would ever hire him.

His life would be over!

"Mr. Carter," Mr. Harrison said, stopping. He frowned, his gaze turning icy.

Tyler clenched his fists, ready to argue.

But then, a clear, cool voice spoke from beside him. "Minor? Been punished? Are you saying that abandoning your post in the middle of a crisis because of your ego is a minor issue? And that missing out

on the glory of 'saving Project Aegis'

is your punishment?"

Tyler's expression faltered.

That was exactly what he thought.

He had lost a chance to add a brilliant achievement to his resume, lost a moment of immense glory.

Wasn't that punishment enough?

"Hah."

Serena let out a cold laugh, her eyes filled with scorn. "So you dedicate yourself to national research just for your so-called glory?"

Her gaze made Tyler flush with

shame. He wanted to lash out, but

he remembered that this young

woman actually possessed

incredible skills. She was the

One

who had led the charge to save Project Aegis.

He forced down his anger and muttered, "Of course... of course not. I... I want to contribute to the country..."

"The country doesn't need you," Serena said, glancing at Mr. Harrison with an emotionless expression.

Mr. Harrison understood. He waved a hand at Tyler. "You, go home and rest. Come

to the institute tomorrow to complete the paperwork."

Those few words sealed his fate.

How could Tyler accept this?

"Mr. Harrison, I can't accept this disciplinary action!" he shouted, his eyes red. He pointed a finger at Serena "She's not even part of the institute! What right does she have to decide my future?"

Just thinking about how he had lost such a huge opportunity for glory and recognition from national leaders all because of Serena made him seethe with resentment.

If Serena had just said from the beginning that she was here to help Mr. Harrison.

He wouldn't have doubted her, wouldn't have stormed off, and wouldn't have lost everything.

Now, Serena owed him!

What right did she have to convince Mr. Harrison to fire him?

It wasn't fair!

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Mr. Harrison's expression darkened, and his gaze turned stone-cold.

"Daniel Carter, you believe that abandoning your post in the middle of an operation is a minor issue?"

His voice was stern and heavy, his eyes sharp. "Daniel, even now, you still don't understand what you did wrong."

"Mr. Davenport is your superior. You disobeyed the chain of command. That is your first mistake."

"During a critical situation, you let your personal feelings dictate your actions, abandoning your colleagues and your duties. That is your second!"

He stared at Tyler coldly. "You should be thankful that Miss Lancaster saved you! Otherwise, if your departure had led to any mishap with Project Aegis, you would have been held fully responsible!"

"So, even without Miss Lancaster's input, the institute has no place for an irresponsible and undisciplined researcher like you."

Tyler's face was ashen. His breath came in ragged, wheezing gasps, a product of his extreme agitation.

He opened his mouth to speak.

But Mr. Harrison couldn't be bothered to look at him any longer and turned to leave. "Mr. Harrison, Mr. Harrison!"

Tyler scrambled after him in a panic. "I know I was wrong, I really do! I'll never do it again, from now on..."

"There is no 'from now on' for you," Mr. Harrison cut him off, not wanting to waste any more time. Frowning, he was about to call for the Department of Defense patrol to remove the man.

Before he could say a word.

Tyler's eyes turned crimson. A furious, crazed expression twisted his face as he lunged at Mr. Harrison. "I've begged you, I've humbled myself! Why won't you forgive me? Why do you have to fire me? You know... you know that if the Elyndor Institute of Advanced Sciences lets me go, no one else will ever hire me!"

"Daniel!" Mr. Harrison was caught off guard by the sudden attack. As a man in his sixties, he had no time to react.

With a snarling face, Tyler reached out to grab Mr. Harrison by the neck.

However...

Before his hands could touch Mr. Harrison.

Suddenly, Mr. Harrison was pulled sharply to the right, out of his reach.

In his place, a long, slender leg swung through the air.

With a loud thud.

A sharp pain exploded in his chest, feeling as if his organs were being twisted

together. He cried out in agony and was sent flying backward.

He slammed hard against the wall before sliding to the floor.

"It's you again... you again!"

Tyler clutched his chest, his face contorted in pain. He glared at Serena with venom in his eyes. "You think you're so great just because you fixed Project Aegis? Who are you to decide everything? Who do you think you are?"

He cursed between harsh coughs.

The Department of Defense patrol guards heard the commotion and arrived in seconds.

Seeing the scene before them.

They immediately raised their rifles, aiming them at Tyler.

The sight of the dark muzzles aimed at him made Tyler go limp with fear.

"She, Miss Lancaster, is of course

great. She's on a level you will never reach," Mr. Harrison said, his face grim as he looked down at Tyler.

"And as the true director of the Elynstor Institute of Advanced Sciences, why wouldn't she have the right to decide your fate?

Tyler's face went white. His eyes bulged in disbelief as he looked from Mr. Harrison

to Serena.

This... young woman, who didn't even look twenty, was the director of the institute? How was that possible?

Only then did Tyler realize what he had just done. He began to tremble uncontrollably, tears streaming down his face as he sobbed loudly. Mr. Harrison, I... I'm sorry! I didn't mean it! I was just... I was so angry, I..." sŵnovels

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Mr. Harrison remained silent, simply waving a hand for the Department of Defense guards to take the man away.

Initially, Tyler was only being fired from the institute.

But now.

For assaulting a nationally-renowned professor, he'd be doing time in prison.

"Serena, I'm truly sorry. I never thought you'd have to witness something like this," Mr. Harrison said, looking embarrassed.

Serena typically only came to the institute for critical situations like today's, which they couldn't handle on their own.

He couldn't believe something like this had happened during one of her rare visits.

"As long as you're not hurt," Serena replied, largely unfazed.

Mr. Harrison smiled. "You pulled me out of the way, didn't you? It's getting late. Why don't you stay in the institute's dormitory tonight? I've had your room kept clean."

He had been trying to convince Serena to take over as director of the institute for years.

Serena glanced at the time and shook her head. "I have to go back. I need to give my grandfather massage first thing in the morning."

To help the old man manage the pain during his treatment, she had prepared a special medicated bath for him to soak in for two days to relax his leg muscles.

Tomorrow was the day to begin the treatment.

Besides...

If she didn't go home, her family would probably wait up for her all night.

"Good, good. Our Serena has a family that cares for her now," Mr. Harrison's expression softened into one of fatherly affection. He no longer called her by the formal "Miss Lancaster."

He continued with a sigh, "I haven't

seen you smile since you returned to the Wynn family four years ago. I can tell you're getting along well with your real family and that puts my mind at ease."

Serena's lips curved into a slight smile as she gave a soft "Mm."

The two of them had just passed through the final security checkpoint of the institute.

"Mr. Harrison!"

Isabella, who had been lying in wait, stepped out from the shadows.

She forced a stiff smile onto her face, her eyes darting between Serena and Mr. Harrison before landing squarely on Serena. "Serena."

"Why are you still here?" Mr. Harrison frowned. "I told you, if you need something, make an appointment through the university."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Harrison." Isabella clenched her fists, keenly aware of his displeasure.

Originally, she had come to see Mr. Harrison today to secure a spot as his student, to get a firm commitment from him.

But now...

It was clear he was annoyed and impatient with her.

Isabella suppressed the turmoil in her heart and put on a gentle smile, glancing again at Serena. "I was just thinking, it's so late. I was worried about my sister Serena going home alone, so wanted to wait here and got

go back with her."

Then, adopting a dignified and graceful posture, she gave Mr. Harrison a slight bow.

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Harrison. Serena can be thoughtless, keeping you this late."

In a desperate attempt to salvage her image in Mr. Harrison's eyes, Isabella had to swallow her disgust for Serena and pretend to be a concerned sister. She had to use their relationship to her advantage.

After all...

Mr. Harrison's attitude toward Serena was highly unusual.