

Repurposed Assets

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Ashton was a natural wiz when it came to computers and engineering, being able to take apart a laptop at the early age of ten and putting it back together without a single hitch after going up the scales from analog clocks to smartphones.

And it didn't take long for young Ashton to develop a further interest in machines, moving on to coding and other digital mumbo jumbo no kid his age should've been able to process and understand.

But he was no ordinary kid, born to two of the greatest minds of the century responsible for developing some of the government's most vital infrastructure and operating software. Ashton's parents wasted no time in teaching their child all they knew in the hopes that he would one day surpass them.

"You've got the potential to right so many wrongs in this world son, and we're gonna teach you how to do it!"

That was what he remembered his father telling him all those years ago when he was nothing more than a naive young boy in the basement of his parents' workshop. But that didn't mean his entire childhood had been grueling lessons in coding and disassembling complex machinery. Because like any other boy his age, Ashton had a fondness for games and animated shows, with his earlier exposure giving him plenty of time to get familiar with the big hitters like the Fate series.

Unfortunately for the boy, not many shared his interest in technology and science, shunning him as the eccentric nerd of the class on his first day in high school after he'd gone off a tangent during icebreaker on day one. The usual buzzing reception and wide eyed interest from his middle school days absent in the lazy eyes of his classmates as some broke into mocking jeers and laughter.

And when he tried to stand up for his family after some no-faced bullies had gone so far as to insult his parents when he brought up their profession during lunch break, a one-sided beating had broken out, with the frail body of Ashton standing no chance against the more athletic kids as they laid into him.

He learned two things after that day. That the outside world wasn't as kind as he thought it would be and that words wouldn't be enough to win fights. He needed insurance, something that would make sure everyone knew not to mess with him and that he meant business. The words of his father rang in his mind as he laid still in bed with his aching face bandaged up, diabolical plans and insidious ideas roiling in his mind.



Balancing studies and revenge had been a simple thing to do for the young genius, keeping to himself all day and only ever speaking to his parents when he came back home from school, ensuring them that he was doing fine and keeping his project a secret before rushing upstairs to continue his work on a tool that he had gathered some inspiration from after recently coming across an interesting thing many people seemed interested in these days on mobile app stores.

It was taking a long time, with Ashton having to endure the abuse meted out by the thuggish students who had formed into a tight knit gang of sorts led by one of his classmates with a typically crude name of Jack Spencer, making him a primary target for daily shakedowns of his lunch money, due in part to his claims of his parents working for the government. Probably stemming from less than pleasant run-ins with the law.

"C'mon rich kid! You've gotta have more than this right? Didn't you say mummy and daddy rake in the dough all day working for the suits at the military or some shit?"

It had made him eager to exact his revenge on more than one occasion, but he wasn't willing to test out prototype tech that would most likely end up killing the douchebag. He didn't want to be a murderer, he wanted to see his bully suffer for all he had done to him and the others he targeted, but he needed to remain alive for that to happen at all.

And to make matters worse, the smug dolt had gotten himself a girlfriend from a grade above and the queen bee most of the delinquent girls flocked around; Nadia Einsworth. Apparently the shame of her family who were haughty socialites, Nadia had taken to venting her stress by bullying other girls whom she saw as being too high and mighty, which basically meant everyone else, while following along with her newfound boyfriend's every whim, including going out of her way to add herself onto Ashton's hitlist. Alongside her long list of other offences including ignoring the school dress code and other such violations.

While many seemed to mindlessly drool after her good looks and '*shining*' personality, Ashton had to hold back his disgust whenever the arrogant bitch had him backed up into



a corner, that annoying whiny voice of hers raking against his ears. Forced to walk away from the many times he had seen her picking on other girls with her entourage of mindless drones.

For someone in the cheerleading squad, it seemed the vapid smile he'd seen from her past performances was just for show with the way she scowled down at him from her lofty position.

"So sorry hun, but baby Jack tells me you're not being cooperative with him, nothin' personal alright?"

Eventually, weeks would turn into months, and before he knew it, a year had already come and gone, with his secret project seemingly missing one final piece before it could truly function without incident. But Ashton was still just an ordinary young man, without access to more advanced technology and knowledge, it seemed as if he was stuck at a dead end. Fumbling with loose ends he could never clip all throughout the winter break with one week left till the next school year began.

Until his father had entered his room without warning, giving him no chance to hide the handheld device lying disassembled beneath a lamp. But he wasn't here to rat him out, instead, the man had simply sat down comfortably beside his son, inspecting what was for all intents and purposes; his first creation.

Ashton knew his dad was appraising his work from the focused look in his eyes, prying apart components and figuring out their mechanics and purpose all with a simple glance. Waiting with bated breath before his idol puts down the device with an approving nod.

"Nice work...but you've got yourself a dangerous tool here son. It's missing one last piece to make it work...don't give me that look now, wouldn't be much of a father if I didn't know my boy was being bullied in school!"

As embarrassing as it was to realize all the actions he'd taken to ensure the secrecy of his work, Ashton had been relieved to finally be able to talk to someone else about it who wouldn't protest the idea he had in mind to pay back the people that had tormented him and many others.

It came as a slight shock to learn that both his parents were agreeable to the idea, with his mother joining over video call since she wasn't home that evening. Apparently to get to where they were now in the government, there were many things they had to commit themselves to do, treading the thin gray line between good and evil as they worked for the safety of the country.

But by the end of that night, and with the combined intellect of his parents, Ashton's device was ready to go after a serious moment of swearing an oath never to use it on those who didn't deserve it, going to bed with a

feeling of joy he hadn't felt in a long time. But considering the extra oomph his father had added to the device and what it would do to Jack and Nadia, it was a strange thing to derive joy from.

Then again, who wouldn't be happy with getting some payback?

-CONTINUED OVER ON THE PATREON-