

## Story Deconstruction: Cruel Intentions

[This movie is currently available on Netflix]

**Concept:** the promiscuous games spoiled rich kids play (and I'd even add that Sebastian Valmont is conceptual as a character, because he's extreme compared to most people)

**Premise:** a promiscuous teen bets her stepbrother that he can't sleep with the new headmaster's daughter before school starts in the fall

### Main Characters:

**Sebastian**—Protagonist (Hero)

**Catherine**—Antagonist

**Annette**—secondary

**Cecile**—secondary

**Ronald**—secondary

**Greg**—secondary

**Blaine**—secondary

### Part One: Set Up

The story opens with Sebastian driving to his therapy appointment. When he gets there he has a conversation with his therapist about how she cured him. He's no longer the sex-addicted deviant he once was. Or so he wants her to believe.

But when he leaves her office, we discover things aren't quite what they seem.

**Hook:** We find out Sebastian charmed the therapist's daughter and then took naked pictures of her, which he posted on the internet. And when the therapist calls him out on it, he laughs, acts like he has no idea what she's referring to, and then proceeds to use his charms to pick up another girl.

This is a character-driven story, so this hooks us on Sebastian as a character. We aren't sure if we like him yet, but we are definitely interested in seeing more of him.

The rest of the set up shows us Sebastian's home life—he lives between a house in NYC and his aunt's house on Long Island. We find out that his mom isn't in the picture (we aren't told why) and his dad is never around—neither is his stepmom (again, no explanation for why).

We are introduced to the nature of his relationship with his stepsister, which borders on sexual and inappropriate. We learn that she's the main female figure in his life right now, and that the two of them are constantly cooking up schemes to get even with people who have harmed them or bothered them in some way (example, Sebastian shares that he took on the challenge of photographing and sleeping with the therapist's daughter simply because the therapist was 'overcharging' him for service).

And then Sebastian shares that he's "sick of sleeping with the same girl" all the time. He's looking for a real challenge. And then he introduces us to one: the new headmaster's daughter has a published manifesto in a popular teen magazine sharing why she's waiting to have sex 'til she's in love. It's the perfect challenge for him.

**First Plot Point:** Sebastian makes a bet with his stepsister, Catherine: he has to sleep with the headmaster's daughter before school starts in the fall. If he does, he gets Catherine; if he doesn't, Catherine gets his hot car.

## **Part Two: Reaction**

The real story has begun. Now Sebastian is reacting to making this bet. He immediately goes to find Annette (the headmaster's daughter), who happens to be staying at his aunt's house for a couple weeks while her parents house-hunt. He finds her and introduces himself, and he tells her that he read her manifesto and thinks it's a load of crap.

But then she turns the tables on him by sharing that someone sent her a letter telling her all about his antics and the games he plays to get girls in bed. And she's not having it.

More reaction takes place as Sebastian tries to find out who it was that sent the letter.

**Pinch Point 1:** Catherine calls Sebastian on his cell and asks him “did you fuck her yet?” This is a simple reminder of the Antagonist (Catherine) and the bet they have going on.

Sebastian is starting to realize that he’s going to have to dig much deeper and be even more deceitful and manipulative than he ever has before. Because Annette isn’t going for his usual charm or the usual lines he uses on the other girls. She even goes so far as to tell him that he’s “not her type.”

Sebastian is pulling out all the stops, and even agrees to accompany Annette on a charity excursion: they go to a local nursing home and spend time with some elderly people.

**Midpoint:** Annette makes Sebastian laugh and smile.

Sebastian is a very serious person and rarely ever cracks a smile or laughs at all, unless he’s doing something sinister. While driving back from the nursing home, Sebastian is trying his usual lies, telling Annette that he really enjoyed hanging out with the elderly woman he was paired with. She calls him out on it and says she knows he’s lying.

Finally he admits that yes, he’s lying and that he hates doing charity work. Annette tells him that it doesn’t make him a bad person, and that he shouldn’t take himself so seriously all the time.

He says he’s not going to lighten up and so she starts making funny faces at him until he’s laughing and smiling.

A very simple, quiet moment in the movie. But it’s HUGE when it comes to shifting the story in a whole new direction. Because now we can see that Sebastian is falling for Annette. This. Changes. Everything.

### **Part Three: Attack**

We’ve entered Part Three of the story, when Sebastian is allowed to start taking actions that will actually move him closer to his goal (winning the bet). Except now that he’s starting to fall for Annette, he’s finds he’s losing himself a little.

Sebastian even tells Catherine that he’s falling for Annette. An important moment, because Catherine is the Antagonist, and this is something she’s going to use against him later in the story.

Sebastian goes to Annette and kisses her. She kisses him back, but then pushes him away. He asks her why they can't be together, and she hits him with it: she doesn't trust herself when she's with him.

At this point, Sebastian is in deep. And he has also stepped up his manipulation to a whole new level. He goes to Annette's room and tells her that he's leaving. He's going back to his house in the city because he "can't take her games anymore." He's playing mind games with Annette so that she'll sleep with him.

And then Annette does something surprising: she goes for it. She decides to sleep with Sebastian. He can't believe it's really happening—he has won the bet.

Except when Annette gets on the bed and waits for him to join her, he suddenly realizes that he can't do it. So he tells her he's sorry and runs out of the room.

This is a huge moment for Sebastian, because he had the chance to win the bet and reach his goal... but he doesn't do it. He knows up to that point he was doing it for the wrong reasons. But now he has a new reason: love.

**Pinch Point 2:** Catherine wakes Sebastian up and asks him "how last night went." He proceeds to tell her that he had a chance to sleep with Annette, but he didn't do it. Catherine calls him a "chump" and then tells him that Annette has left and gone to stay with someone else. She's gone and after last night she'll never go near Sebastian again.

This is a direct reminder of the Antagonist and the bet.

Now Sebastian has to act and act fast. He calls a friend to ask if he knows where Annette went. The friend shares where she is so Sebastian can go find her.

Something important to note here is that Sebastian chooses to wear a bright blue shirt. The whole movie he has been wearing black on black and other dark colors. This is the first time we see him wearing color. This is a way of showing how he is changing as a character.

It pays off when Sebastian meets Annette at the top of the escalator. She looks at what he's wearing and says, "I'm impressed," and Sebastian says, "well, I'm in love."

He then, of course, gets to sleep with Annette. He has achieved his goal and won his bet.

Except now he doesn't care. All he cares about is being with Annette.

When Catherine tries to make arrangements to pay off the bet, Sebastian tells her he's "not in the mood."

In part 3 of the story is when the Antagonist gets stronger as the Protagonist grows and gets stronger. The antagonism and the conflict and dramatic tension also grow because of it.

Catherine walks in on Sebastian telling Annette that he loves her while talking to her on the phone. So she calls him out and says that he doesn't love her anymore.

Sebastian tries to make her feel better by telling her that "it's just a bet." But when Catherine tries to kiss him, he pushes her off, calling it ridiculous.

So Catherine pulls out the big guns. She threatens Sebastian's reputation—she even threatens to call the headmaster and tell him that Annette slept with Sebastian and all about Sebastian's past. Sebastian plays to her game by telling her that he was planning on breaking things off with Annette that afternoon anyhow.

Sebastian walks around for a bit, thinking through the things Catherine said. And he realizes that she's right, and that people can't change. So he goes to break up with Annette.

Except he's a total mess while he's doing it. His body language does not match the words coming out of his mouth. And Annette calls him on it.

We know now that Sebastian is lying and he really does love Annette, even though he's breaking up with her.

**Second Plot Point:** Catherine tells Sebastian that he's her puppet and she controls him.

After Sebastian breaks up with Annette, he goes to Catherine's room with a bottle of champagne to celebrate. He pours her a glass and asks what they should toast to. She says "my victory." Sebastian assumes she means her victory over Annette... but then she hits him with it: she found it amusing to ruin things for Sebastian, because he's her puppet and she controls him.

Now Sebastian knows that he totally messed up and it may not be fixable. Ever.

## **Part Four: Resolution**

We are officially in Part Four of the story. This is where Sebastian steps up to be the Martyr and do whatever it takes to save the day.

He reflects on how he has lived his life up to that point, and he realizes that he has taken pleasure in the misery of others. A meaningless life.

Sebastian writes a letter to Annette and brings it to the place she's staying, along with his most prized possession: his journal. This is important because it shows us that he's ready to change and that he has changed.

In the letter he asks Annette to read the journal and learn the truth about him and everything that's been going on. And then he asks her to give him another chance because he's a wreck without her. (Again, this shows a huge change for him as a character. The Sebastian from part one could never be capable of this type of action.)

When Sebastian delivers the letter, he crosses a street after two cabs pass by him. This is important foreshadowing for the ending of the story.

While Annette is reading the journal, Sebastian is walking around the park near her apartment.

But the Antagonist isn't finished yet. She has something else up her sleeve. Catherine calls Ronald (who has been part of a subplot going on during the rest of the story) and tells him that Sebastian hit her and slept with his girlfriend.

Now Ronald is looking for Sebastian, and he wants blood. He finds him on the street and starts a fight with him. As they're fighting, Annette is walking out toward Sebastian.

She sees Ronald attacking Sebastian, so she runs over to try and stop him. She knocks Ronald over, but as she does, she falls into the middle of the street.

And there's a cab barreling toward her, with an unaware driver behind the wheel. When he looks up at the last second and hits the breaks, Sebastian screams out Annette's name and then pushes her out of the way of the cab.

This, of course, means the cab hits him instead. He smacks the windshield and goes up over the top of it and lands in the street. We know that Sebastian isn't going to make it.

But he saved Annette's life. He is the martyr.

Annette runs over and when he sees her he says, "I love you, Annette." She reciprocates the love. And then he dies. (This completes his character arc.)

But there's more coming. Because Sebastian was the catalyst for defeating Catherine, the Antagonist. Annette ends up publishing Sebastian's journal and then passing out copies to everyone on campus, including the headmaster and Catherine's parents.

Everyone finds out this seemingly sweet and innocent girl is actually a deceitful, manipulative coke head who has been messing with people's lives for years. Catherine being outed is the defeating of the Antagonist.

And Sebastian is still the hero, even though he's gone, because he was the catalyst for Annette being able to publish the journal and defeat Catherine for him.

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