

Runaway 431

Chapter 431

Irene turned to find a silhouette standing there, but she knew right away that it was him.

She had felt no fear even as she confronted Ian, but now that he was here, she became fearful that he had fallen victim to Ian's devious nature.

Ian had her life and Tommy's life in his hands, and the leverage would keep Isaac's hands tied.

"Oh, he's here. See?" Ian laughed in delight—he was one-upping Isaac for once!

Nonetheless, Isaac walked steadily with composure, not at all flustered despite present circumstances.

There was a brief look of pain and worry in his eyes as he glanced at Irene before he turned back toward Ian with an impassive look. "Here. What you asked for."

Ian, however, was actually scared of Isaac, and told one of his goons to get it instead of taking it himself. When the goon appeared hesitant, he kicked the goon on his bottom. "Go!"

As the goon walked toward Isaac with apprehension, Ian said, "I knew it—you care about this woman, and are willing to give up Remy for her!"

In reality, Ian had actually felt uncertain when he made the bet with Irene. After all, giving away Remy for one woman was outrageous.

Naturally, he was now even more bent on holding Irene hostage—even though he had already put that explosive vest on her, he directed two more goons to hold her arms, stopping her from moving.

"Care? I'm just doing this because she is the mother of my son, and I'd rather not be seen as heartless," Isaac said without looking at Irene.

After all, he was just pretending not to care.

On the other hand, Irene became uneasy and spaced out.

'I'm just doing this because she is the mother of my son' seemed to echo in her mind.

He was just being nice because she was Tommy's mother? Charity given to her for Tommy's sake?

Turning toward Isaac, she murmured, "Y—You never loved me at all?"

Isaac's fingers clenched when he saw that she was uneasy. "Does that matter? We have a son."

He was worried that Ian would hurt her if he acted overly concerned about her, especially when she was strapped to explosives.

Urgh-

Irene's face turned as white as a sheet, and she wanted to throw up right then.

She had presumed that they loved each other, and that they were just a little estranged recently

because of Yvaine's death—that he actually cared, but needed time.

Therefore, hearing him saying now that he only cared because of Tommy tore her heart.

Would he be even nicer if she told him now that she was pregnant too? That they would have a second child?

But the love she thought they had was just a joke!

At the same time, Isaac's phone vibrated in his hand. He did not check it, however, and merely kept
1/2

holding on to it and counting the number of times it was vibrating—three times were the agreed signal from James and Stan if they found Tommy and Sheryl, while once would mean that they had yet to reach them.

And now, it vibrated three times before stopping.

Isaac did not relax at all, however, because Irene was in grave danger. Glancing at his own SUV without being noticed, he continued, "You have it now. Let her go."

"No, what I say goes around here." Ian laughed in disdain. "Do you see the explosives on her? One press on the trigger, and she'll be blown into pieces. Did you really think I'd let her off that easily? When did you become so naive, Isaac Jefferson?"

Walking up to Irene with his eyes still fixed on Isaac, he said, "You destroyed my family. I'm just repaying the favor."

Irene's eyes then widened, her thick eyelashes then dampened.

She looked upon Isaac with fondness, a reluctance to part, and clear misery.

Then, she murmured with a quiver in her voice. "Tommy is your son. You must save him, and take good care of him..."

Isaac frowned and growled sternly, "What do you think you're doing?!"

Chapter 432

Isaac noticed that Irene was going to make a move.

And just as he spoke, Irene somehow managed to shake off the two goons restraining her and started running toward the river!

Isaac's face fell and he gave chase right then.

He managed to catch her by the wrist and firmly pulled. As she fell into his arms, he quietly told her, "Just stop..."

Irene shook her head in despair. "I don't want you to get hurt because of me."

She had lost all hope when Isaac said that he was only being nice to her because of Tommy. Still, she did not want him to be coerced by Ian because of herself, and decided to do one last thing for him.

After all, he was the only man she had ever loved!

Seeing that they were both together, Ian remembered his dead mother and crippled father right then, and promptly pressed the detonator he was holding, intent on blowing them both up.

Irene, however, sensed it before he could, and bit Isaac's arm as hard as she could. The pain made him release her ever so slightly, and Irene seized the moment to push him away.

"Save Tommy..." she cried as she leaped into the river.

Then, a thunderous boom erupted.

Even though Irene managed to push him away, Isaac was still too close and was struck by the shockwave, knocking him to the ground even as water and flames rushed into the air, filling it with the choking scent of dynamite and splashing the riverbanks like a violent tide.

Just then, everyone in Isaac's SUV rushed outside—he certainly did not go alone, and brought the giant car to hide them.

His men were all armed with tranquilizers, and were supposed to take out Ian and his goons when the opportunity presented itself.

But it never did.

Ian had already taken a machete from one of his goons and was walking toward Isaac to make sure he was dead—a tranquilizer dart hit Ian square on the neck before he got too far, and he dropped unconscious immediately.

Soon, his goons were taken down as well, while the leader of Isaac's men promptly barked, "Go! Search

the river! We must find her..."

Isaac found himself in a hospital when he regained consciousness.

Remembering what he saw before he was knocked out, he asked immediately, "Where is she?"

"They're operating on her," James assured him, having rushed to the hospital and was waiting as Isaac came to. "We've saved Sheryl and Tommy as well, and Stan is taking care of them as we speak. Don't worry."

As Isaac looked sharply at him, however, James quickly lowered his head.

"Take me to her," Isaac growled as he got up and strode outside, asking as he did, "Is she going to be alright?"

James kept his head lowered and said nothing—he could barely recognize Irene when he saw her, let alone be confident that she could be saved.

"Tell me!" Isaac barked.

James lowered his head further as he hurried along. "It was very serious. She was covered in blood when they fished her out of the sea, and her face was completely disfigured..."

Isaac stopped in his tracks and wheeled on James. "What was that?"

James did not dare to look up at all, and quietly said, "It's very serious..."

Isaac's fingers twitched, and he slowly clenched them into a fist, his knuckles cracking and turning pale even as the veins bulged.

"The doctors are doing their best. They might be able to save her," James continued.

"Where... are they?" Isaac growled, his voice unwittingly quivering even though he was trying his best to stay calm, and he had to pause for a moment to finish.

"It's the first room. The hospital put their best doctors on it too," James replied.

Though Isaac headed toward the operating room steadily, he was actually a mess inside.

The indicator outside the operating room was still red, indicating that the doctors were still operating on her.

On several occasions, Isaac appeared to be ready to rush inside, and would really have done so if James did not stop him. "You're really going to kill her if you disturb the doctors..."

Even so, he felt as if something was stuck in his chest and he could not breathe, and he was almost hyperventilating just to stop himself from suffocating.

He remembered the look of despair in Irene's eyes at the time, and he knew right then that she had clearly misunderstood him.

It was why she pushed him away and leaped into the river, prepared to die.

The indicator outside the operating room suddenly turned off, and the doors opened as a doctor stepped

out.

Isaac rushed up to him, and he breathed with enormous difficulty, "Is she alright?"

Chapter 433

The doctor appeared very apologetic and regretful. "We've done our best, but her injuries were too extensive..."

James's heart skipped a beat and he promptly turned toward Isaac, whose face contorted with emotion. Knowing that he was treading on thin ice, he said, "Mr. Jefferson..."

"Are you kidding me?" Isaac growled straight out of his throat.

The doctor appeared apprehensive but said, "We won't joke about something like this, sir,"

Isaac did not want to believe it, but the doctor's words were clear.

His neck was straight and stiff as his Adam's apple bobbed repeatedly.

"You have to calm down, Mr. Jefferson." James tried to reason with him, but it did not work—if there was one moment when Isaac could not calm down, it was this.

He strode toward the operating room, but he stopped at the doorway after he opened the doors, his legs seemed to turn into lead just then.

All the doctors who took part in the surgery all stood in a row beside the surgical table, each of them keeping their heads down.

Stephen Carr stood at the front, his head lowered like the others and not about to talk to Isaac.

Silence was the best thing to do at a time like this.

As for Isaac, he could see the body on the surgical table from the doorway.

There were still tubes attached to it, and the face was thoroughly burned and disfigured.

Isaac's eyes were red. Reluctant to believe that it was Irene lying on the table, he laughed icily, "Are you trying to trick me with another corpse?!"

Stephen's heart skipped a beat—how could he tell?!

The face was supposed to be disfigured beyond recognition!

Stephen then looked up and saw that Isaac was doing his best to hide his emotion, and knew right then that he did not actually know that the body was not Irene's.

Isaac was just in denial—refusing to accept the truth that Irene was dead.

Mustering his courage, Stephen said, "We've done our best, but I'm afraid we can't do anything. Her injuries were too extensive..."

Isaac leveled a sharp, murderous glare at him right then. "Or is it just because you're incompetent?!" Stephen did not retort—doing so right now would only make things worse, and the situation might spiral out of control.

At the same time, Isaac swept a cutting glare over every doctor present and walked up to the surgical table—the face of the body lying on it was simply unrecognizable.

His breath left his lungs, and he started to suffocate as his whole body stiffened and trembled.

I—It was not her.

He refused to believe it.

He remembered a red birthmark on her right shoulder.

He pulled down the blue sheet covering the body, but saw that the shoulder was thoroughly burned. He could not tell...

On the other hand, James was worried that Isaac would lose control and get hostile against the doctors. Hence, despite knowing that Isaac was in a foul mood right now, he withstood the pressure and said, "No one wanted this to happen, but it did anyway. There's still a lot of things you have to decide—for example, what should we do with Ian Jefferson?"

Although he was attempting to divert Isaac's attention, he did not know that Isaac had lost his usual calmness and composure.

This was not the man of foresight and vision he knew.

"Kill him," Isaac snarled.

James gasped—Isaac would never have said that before.

Even if he wanted Ian dead, he would have devised a legal, logical move since murder was a crime regardless.

"We could come up with some way to torment him," James suggested.

Isaac, however, was not playing along.

"All of you—out," he said quietly.

James was still worried. "Mr. Jefferson..." "Out!"

Chapter 434

James sighed and said feebly, "Everyone, please leave."

Given the circumstances, it was ideal to let him calm down right now.

As all the doctors filed out of the room, Stephen remained afraid to talk to Isaac, and so told James instead, "We really shouldn't leave the body there. It needs to be sent to the morgue soon."

James certainly understood and agreed, or Isaac would never leave this room.

"I'll try my best," he told Stephen.

Stephen lowered his gaze. "Sorry for all the trouble."

James actually thought that this was what he was supposed to do anyway... How was it any trouble?

Meanwhile, Isaac was standing alone in front of the surgical table after chasing everyone out. Everything around him seemed to turn still, and it looked as if he was alone in the world!

Hours passed, and he never stepped out even though it was already nighttime.

Outside, James was beside himself with worry, but he did not dare to go in.

Stan arrived just then and asked, "How happened?"

James's eyes were beady even as he looked at his colleague and told him hoarsely that Irene was killed in an explosion, which left Stan in disbelief.

“How could this happen? I thought we were prepared? And what is Mr. Jefferson going to do now?” James told him, “He’s still inside after chasing everyone out. No one dares to go in and disturb him.”

“This isn’t going to work,” Stan replied.

James knew that too, but was there any other way?

Sitting on the bench, Stan kept scratching his head for a while before groaning, “Well, what are we supposed to do now?”

James actually had no idea what to do just then. “Sheryl and Tommy are fine, right?”

The thought would actually calm himself, and Stan quickly looked up when he was reminded of that. “I have an idea now.”

“What is it?” James asked.

“He still has family aside from Irene,” Stan told him.

James came to a realization right then. “Are you talking about Tommy?”

“Yes, Tommy is his son,” Stan replied. “No matter how sad he is or how he is unable to get over Irene, can he really abandon his own son?”

James actually thought that it made sense, but he had his concern regardless. “This is a hospital, though. And is it really okay to bring a baby near dead people?”

“That’s his mother,” Stan pointed out. “Our main priority right now is to help Mr. Jefferson get over Irene’s death.”

It did make sense, so James said, “Alright. Let’s do this.”

“I’ll bring Tommy over,” Stan offered.

“Fine, you go do that,” James replied. “I’ll keep an eye on things here.”

Stan hence left, and returned over an hour later with Tommy.

The baby had been given a fright and cried a lot after being kidnapped, and it took Sheryl a while to coax him to sleep.

He eventually did, but it was still quite a while, and he was also sniffing from time to time as if he would wake up at any moment.

“Now, you go in,” Stan told James—he was still a little too scared to approach Isaac.

Moreover, he was always the best at hiding.

On the other hand, James really wanted Isaac to pull himself together. “I’ll do it.”

“I always knew we could count on you when it counts,” Stan told him.

James shot him a vicious glare. “That’s all because you’re a rat, and I always have to take the fall whenever something happens.”

"The best are always busy," Stan retorted.

"Fuck off," James snapped, but took a deep breath and started to carry Tommy into the operating room. However, he had barely reached the doorway when Isaac yelled, "Get out!"

Tommy was immediately woken up, and started bawling.

"Boo-hoo... Mah-mah..."

James had no choice but to leave. As he had zero experience with children, he simply rocked Tommy as he cooed, "It's alright, you don't have to cry..."

"Boo-hoo..." Tommy kept crying, leaving James anxious the more he did.

Soon, James was sweating bullets, "Well, what now?"

"Mr. Jefferson definitely heard Tommy," Stan replied. "But he's not coming out. Is he really abandoning Tommy because of Irene?"

"Maybe it's just too hard to take," James said.

"Well, he was hurting too when Yvaine died, but not like this-"

"That's different," James cut Stan short. "To him, Yvaine was dead more than ten years ago, and any sentiment would have faded. Even if we did find her again, how much sentiment could he have recovered after she died soon after? But Irene is different, because she's the first woman he allowed into his heart."

James certainly broke it down with clarity and thoroughly, and Stan agreed since it made perfect sense.

Right now, the key was still for them to make Isaac pull himself together.

Still, Stan was very restless and he started to pace around the walkway. "Tommy is bawling himself hoarse, but he still isn't coming out to check. Isn't the boy his? Doesn't he care...?"

That was when James suddenly said determinedly, "I have an idea!"

Chapter 435

Stan became excited. "What is it?"

"Who's the reason Irene's dead?" James asked.

Stan suddenly stared at James as if he was stupid. "Ian Jefferson, of course!"

"And what if Ian Jefferson suddenly escaped-"

"There's no way he can-I'd never allow him to," Stan cut James short right then, growling viciously, "I'll break his legs if he does."

James did not stop him from finishing, and instead waited until Stan calmed down before explaining, "I know. He isn't getting away, but we can let him go..."

“Let him go?” Stan exclaimed, unable to catch on to what James was planning just then. “It’s already merciful enough that we’re not cutting him into pieces. Did you suddenly have a brain fart or something?”

James rolled his eyes at Stan. “Could you pipe down and hear me out first instead of interrupting every single time?”

Stan finally did so. “Fine. What were you trying to get at?” he asked.

“Since Mr. Jefferson is still grieving Irene, what do you think would happen if we suddenly told him that the one who killed her has escaped? Don’t you think he’d quickly pull himself together to seek vengeance for the one he lost?”

Stan pondered over the idea James proposed.

Nothing seemed to be working at the moment, since even Tommy could not lure Isaac out of the operating room.

In that case, they might have to use Isaac’s hatred to spur him on instead.

If anything, it was worth a try.

“Alright, I’ll send Tommy home right now and release Ian...”

“Wait,” James called out, stopping Stan as the latter left. “Don’t do it so quickly—we need to prepare, and

it won’t do if we somehow lose Ian Jefferson. He’s still out right now, isn’t he?”

“Probably,” Stan replied. “The dart we used would keep anyone out for over ten hours.”

“Dose him further to keep him unconscious and implant him with a tracker. That way, we’ll know where he is no matter where he goes.”

Stan stared at James for a moment before saying, “Good plan. Leave this to me.”

“Remember—the implant must be placed somewhere hidden so that he doesn’t notice,” James added.

“Okay, don’t worry. I’ll get it done right now,” Stan replied.

Tommy had exhausted himself from crying and could now only sniffle in Stan’s arms.

As Stan did not know how to take care of children either, he had to bring Tommy home and leave the baby in Sheryl and Mrs. Watson’s care.

On the other hand, James stood outside the operating room, leaning against the wall as he waited.

Time seemed grilling to him...

“James.”

Isaac suddenly spoke from inside, and James did a double take, thinking that he had misheard.

James opened the doors gingerly, but stayed at the doorway.

“Mr. Jefferson...?”

“Find a place where I can keep her—the surroundings must be ideal. Build it if there isn’t such a place.”

James did another double take. What was that supposed to mean?

Was Isaac saying that they would preserve Irene’s body?

Would it not be better to bury her?

“I’m sorry, M—Mr. Jefferson,” James stammered as he tried to put together the right words. “I think it would be better to bury her...”

Isaac leveled a cool look at James.

His expression was not severe, and it seemed like he calmed down.

However, his lack of emotion, and the absence of warmth in his eyes was actually intimidating just to look at.

“Are you questioning me?” Isaac asked evenly.

“No, sir,” James quickly replied. “I’ll get it done right away.”

With that, James turned and hurried off, as if he would get eaten if he lingered a second longer.

When Isaac was being calm, the pressure he seemed to project was much more suffocating than when he was angry.

Meanwhile, Stephen was in another room within Melville Hospital, staring at the patient in bed as he asked, “Have you made up your mind?”

Chapter 436

The patient on the bed was burned from her right cheek down to her neck.

Although it had been bandaged and medicated, the gruesome carnage underneath could not be concealed.

Unlike incisions or lacerations, burn scars remain because the dead skin cells would linger.

While grafting and plastic surgery were advanced enough to restore Irene’s face completely, the problem was that she was pregnant right now.

She must get an abortion for the antibiotics necessary for surgeries, and even if she did not, it would lead to defects in fetal development or a miscarriage.

Stephen tried to reason with her, saying, “You can have another baby...”

Irene was staring blankly up at the white, fluorescent lights that were dizzying, and closed her eyes.

“No. There’s a reason I survived that explosion... Maybe it’s someone up there intent on having me keep my baby.”

In the instant she was falling into the river, she somehow slipped out of the explosive vest, which only detonated after she dropped underneath the river.

Though the resulting flames and shockwave still struck her while she was underwater, she survived her injuries.

Disfigurement certainly did not matter to her.

Even if beauty was life and death for the ladies, she had no use for it. Was there anyone whom she wanted to look pretty for?

Stephen sighed. "Isaac Jefferson is devastated about your death."

"He's not grieving me. He's probably just sorry for his son who doesn't have a mother," she replied.

Her tone was cold and devoid of her usual passion and liveliness—what Isaac said before left her feeling a fool for all the love and adoration he had for her.

Turning to Stephen, she said, "I would recover in five days at most, but I don't want to stay or I might have second thoughts. Book me a flight to Mead Clinic in three days, and thanks for saving me a spot all this while."

She had somewhere to be, at least.

"After you helped me so much with Mick, I'll do whatever I can to help."

Stephen then held her gaze for a while, and told her what was weighing down on his mind. "I'm worried that the body we used wouldn't keep Isaac fooled. There's a chance that he'd notice..."

"He probably wouldn't notice. He was there, and he knows how powerful the blast was, and that the bomb was tied to me. He should actually be surprised that there was a body at all, since I should be in pieces."

"Your body was fully intact when you were brought in—it's only natural that we used an intact body as well," Stephen pointed out. "His subordinates might get suspicious since they're constantly watching."

"Then I should thank you for getting the perfect replacement," Irene replied.

"Call it a coincidence that there was a fire at the orphanage north of the city. There were five dead, and one of them was a woman with around the same weight and height. She was burned extensively to the point there's no chance of recognition, so Isaac won't be able to tell as long as he doesn't do a DNA test."

"Oh, right... About the other favor, I have footage here of one of Isaac's boys holding your baby. Suffice to say, I think he had been rescued along with your mom."

Stephen had recorded the video in secret and showed it to Irene. Although he was too far away to capture Tommy's face, Irene could recognize her baby's cries.

Her baby... She felt as if a meat hook was driven through her heart at the thought of leaving him and not seeing him, suffocating her from sheer agony.

"I'm sorry... I'm so sorry..."

She did not deserve to be a mother for what she was going to do to him.

Like a broken string of pearls, her tears streamed out of the corner of her eye, trickling into her hair.

Stephen sighed. "Why hurt yourself like this?"

Irene pursed her lips. "Isaac will definitely protect Tommy as long as he stays at his side. The life and education he would have is much better than anything I have to offer."

"That's not what I mean—you have no reason to leave. You have a child, and Isaac would never blame you for Yvaine Lynd's death."

"Have you ever been in love?" Irene asked, cutting him short.

"Things are fine between my wife and myself," Stephen replied.

"Then how would you feel if the person you love and thought was in love with you, turns out to not have loved you at all? Would you understand the despair?"

Stephen frowned. "Is it really that complicated?"

"I didn't know before," Irene said bitterly. "But being in love hurts."

That was when the door swung open, and Stephen turned pale when he saw who it was!

Chapter 437

While Stephen was too nervous to speak, the hospital chief gave him a look that said he knew everything, and rebuked him from the very start, "What do you take this hospital home for, your backyard? A place where you can do anything you like?!"

He had been lenient toward Stephen after the drama with Mick Gooding before, but warned him that nothing like that could be allowed to happen again.

This time, Stephen was caught abusing his authority again to help Irene.

Even if it was the right thing to do, he was committing a serious crime by helping her fake her death, even using someone else's body in replacement!

"I'm sorry..."

"I don't need apologies. I'm not playing along this time. I'll send someone to inform—"

"Sir." Irene got to her feet despite much difficulty.

Stephen moved up to help her stand. "You're still hurt..."

Even so, Irene kept her eyes fixed on the hospital chief. "I asked him to help me. Blame me if you want, but I hope I have your forgiveness this one time."

The chief frowned even as he stared at Irene's face. It would not be a far cry to compare her to Helen of Troy before, but now...

“Your face...”

“It isn’t serious,” Irene replied. “I may be disfigured, but I’m alive. Sir, could you please let it go this one time? Seeing that I’ve never made mistakes since I started working here, and have always given it my all?”

The hospital chief actually felt guilty as he watched her face, and eventually heaved a lengthy sigh.

“Fine, pretend I was never here and that I don’t know a thing. But this must be the last time this happens, or both of you are out of there!”

While his tone and words were stern, he actually did not press the tissue and turned to leave the room.

Stephen heaved a long sigh after he was gone. “Thank goodness he spared us.”

“Sorry for bringing you into this,” Irene said guiltily.

“It’s just a little tit for tat. I’ve caused so much trouble for you before, haven’t I? You really saved me with Mick,” Stephen told her.

Irene tried to smile, but it stung as she tried to move her burned cheek.

“Alright, just rest for now, and don’t say a word. I’ll transport you away from this hospital tonight.”

Irene nodded, still feeling guilty toward Stephen as if she was exploiting him.

She did not help Mick because of Stephen—instead, it was because of Yvaine’s letter to her.

But none of that mattered now, since it was all in the past.

She slowly lay down again and closed her eyes.

James was not at all knowledgeable about anything in the country since he had been working abroad for years. Naturally, he had to ask Stan for help to find a place which satisfied Isaac’s request.

Naturally, Stan found a place soon enough since his time spent working domestically was not for nothing.

There was a castle formerly owned by a late millionaire built halfway up a mountain, and his son had been trying to sell it since his passing because he hated it.

However, no one bought it since it was too expensive.

Even James raised an eyebrow as he stared at it. “A 30 million dollar castle to keep one body? Extravagant, don’t you think?”

Stan rolled his eyes. “Which is more important, money, or getting Mr. Jefferson over Irene Spencer’s death?”

“Of course the latter, but do you really think keeping the corpse counts as getting over it?”

James was skeptical, even as Stan came to a realization.

“Well, stuff like this takes time,” he argued. “Anyway, I’ve already done what you suggested—there’s a tracking microchip in Ian Jefferson’s body now. However, there was an obvious incision made, so I think we should keep him unconscious a little longer before we carry out our plan.”

“Can’t help it then. Let’s wait,” James shrugged, and his tone suddenly changed, “I’ll talk to Mr. Jefferson. now, though I might need your help again to acquire a freezer...”

“Don’t worry. Just leave it to me.” Stan thought nothing of it.

“Make it fast, too.”

Stan simply gave him an ‘ok’ gesture, and James quickly returned to the hospital.

However, he could not find Isaac in the operating room, even though Irene’s body was still there.

He was puzzled—where could Isaac have gone?

Still, just as he stepped out and was about to go on a search, he saw Isaac walking toward him from the other end of the walkway.

And he was not alone. There was another man carrying a box...

Who was he?!

Chapter 438

Nonetheless, James hurried to Isaac’s side. “Sir.”

Isaac glanced at him briefly and asked, “Did you find a place?”

“Yes, sir,” James replied. “We can use it in a couple days.”

“Good.” Isaac remained impassive.

At the same time, James turned toward the man with them, who was dressed formally over his exceedingly fair skin. Also, there was something shady about that face even though he clearly appeared solemn.

“Sir, who is this gentleman?”

Isaac did not answer, and instead headed straight inside the operating room with the man.

James followed, curious.

The man first put down his box and opened it, taking out a pair of gloves and wearing it before pulling off the sheet placed over Irene’s head.

He frowned when he saw the face. “...I don’t think I can do anything here. Burn scars only regenerate on living tissue, but if she’s dead, I can’t restore her face.”

In reality, he was the best mortician Isaac had found to reconstruct cadavers so that they would look their best before they were buried.

Despite his specialty in reinvigorating cold bodies and bestowing upon them eternal beauty, he was shaking his head. "The damage is too extensive. I can't do much here."

Isaac's gaze darkened and there was a brief flash of disappointment in his eyes.

She could not even die with the way she looked before?

That was when the mortician said, "I'd suggest moving her to the morgue soon."

James had been trying to say the same thing for a while, so he quickly echoed, "Yeah, or we could put her in an ice casket if you don't want to leave her here in the hospital. We could bring her to the castle now, in fact."

They just had to wait until Stan set up the freezer, and they would just put the ice casket inside soon after -it should last a while.

"Yes," the mortician agreed. "Leaving her out here is going to make her vulnerable to damage."

It was not as if Isaac did not know that.

However, once Irene's body was placed in a casket, he would lose whatever fantasy he had been holding on to before.

Even to send her to the morgue was a declaration to all that she was dead.

Even now, he refused to confront that reality.

Be that as it may, present circumstances prevented him from lying to himself.

Turning around, he spoke almost inaudible, "Get it done, James. Now leave us be."

Since the mortician could not restore Irene's face, he did not have to stay.

As James and mortician left, however, Isaac's back slowly arched.

Right now, he was no longer the high-and-mighty bigwig who faced his own family's abandonment with composure.

He was utterly vulnerable, for it turned out that he felt pain and misery too.

And that pain was profound, suffocating and silent.

Soon, James returned with the ice casket, while the mortician fixed up Irene's body however he could. He also applied a special powder that would stall putrefaction before they put the body into the casket.

That was when Ricky Spencer suddenly barged in.

He was somehow informed, and dropped limply to the floor when he saw the unrecognizable body. "No. No way, it can't be her..." he murmured, and grabbed the hem of James's shirt. "It's not Irene, right? How could that ugly thing be her? My sister is so beautiful..."

James dropped to a crouch right then and clasped a hand over his mouth, shushing him.

"Don't make a fuss," he said, meeting Ricky's gaze. "I wasn't there when it happened, but the people

who were there saw the explosion, and she was in the middle of it. They also fished her out of the river immediately afterward, so there's no mistaking it—we all wish it was otherwise, but it's reality. She's left us."

Ricky glared at James with stubborn, red eyes, leaving him sighing. "What's the point in glaring at me?"

Ricky pried his hand off. "Who did this?"

"Ian Jefferson," James replied.

"Where is he?" Ricky asked.

"I can send someone to take you to him."

"Make that right now." Ricky clenched his fists, looking ready to kill someone.

James knew that Ricky needed to vent at the moment, and letting him beat up Ian would be cathartic for everyone.

"Do whatever you want, but you have to keep him alive," James told him.

Ricky growled, "He should be dead already."

"I know, but it's not up to you no matter how much he deserves it. I won't let you see him if you can't agree to that much."

"Fine," Ricky breathed through clenched teeth.

Beckoning to one of his boys, James said, "Take him there."

Soon, Ricky was brought to where Ian was kept, when he suddenly received a call.

He was so shocked that his jaw almost dropped!

Chapter 439

It was Lulu Adams—she rarely called Ricky, and she had not done so since her last return to Sunny City. Naturally, her calling him now took him completely by surprise.

While he would have made time to chat with her for as long as he could on any other day, now was not the time for that.

"Lulu, whatever it is, it would have to wait. I'm very busy right now."

"What are you busy with?"

"Beating up someone. I'm hanging up now—I'll call you later."

He hung up just as he said, leaving Lulu dumbstruck over on the other end.

Ricky was young and maybe brash, but he was not going to break the law, was he? Lulu quickly called him again, but Ricky was bent on violence.

He actually found the call irritating, and turned his phone off without answering it.

Lulu kept trying on the other end, and when she was greeted by an automated voice, she was actually left panicking a little...

James's men led Ricky into a dark room. There were no windows, only walls and one steel door that opened from one direction.

Click.

Someone turned on the light, and Ricky quickly found Ian on the floor, his hands tied.

He had to close his eyes from the glaring light—he had been kept in constant darkness and his eyes could not adjust to the brightness that quickly.

It took a long while for him to open his eyes, and as he narrowed his gaze at the doorway, he snorted when he saw that it was not Isaac. "Where's Isaac? Is he alive? Irene Spencer may have pushed him out of harm's way, so he most likely survived... Crying over what bits are left of her, is he?"

He then laughed in contempt. "How I wish to see him bawl like a child."

Ricky was incensed. "Still running your mouth when you're already dead? I'm going to beat you up so hard your own mother won't recognize you, or I'm not a Spencer!"

Ian snorted in disdain. "Which crack did you crawl out of? Yapping like a dog... Wait, dogs don't have last names. Haha..."

He was all too aware of his situation, but he was not getting away even if he went down on his knees and begged.

In that case, why do that at all?

Dissing whoever showed up at least makes him feel cathartic!

On the other hand, Ricky was already furious, and Ian's provocation left him bounding forward, seizing him by the hair and slamming his head right then.

Thump!

There was a dull thud, and Ian felt his mind give out right then.

He was seeing stars, but even before he could recover, Ricky was on top of him, slapping him from left and right...

Pow! Pow! Pow!

Each hit seemed louder and more painful than the last!

Ian turned numb in agony, but Ricky kept hitting him for so long it felt like a century.

Ricky's palm actually hurt, while Ian's face was as red as it was swollen and barely recognizable from before.

However, Ricky did not have enough, and rose to his feet to kick Ian repeatedly.

"Oh, you don't really cut it. Why don't you try killing me instead?" Ian spat a mouthful of blood.

He quickly caught on that Ricky was prone to anger, and having impulsive people like him would only work to his favor.

After all, he knew that now that Isaac had him, he would torment him to the point where he wished he were dead.

In comparison, dying to Ricky's fists was the better option.

And just as he had expected, Ricky was absolutely fuming as Ian was clearly mocking his fists for lacking strength, so that he could barely hurt him.

Could he abide by that?! Absolutely not!

He started to look around for a weapon, but there was nothing around at all.

His eyes turning red, he grabbed Ian by the collar and smashed Ian's own head against his, and actually almost blacked out right then.

The men watching them were all shaking their heads. How stupid did he have to be to do that?

It was obvious that he was not in their line of work.

Stan arrived just then, and promptly dragged him out of the room when he saw Ricky.

Ian was never going to escape, and they could deal with him any time he wanted—right now, they had something more important to do.

"What?!" Ricky actually thought he misheard Stan.

Was he joking?!

Chapter 440

Ricky tried to free himself from Stan, but the other man kept a vice-like grip on his hand to stop him from running.

Even so, Ricky protested. "No. I'd never agree to that—there's no way I can do it anyway. Just let me go!" Stan told him as politely as he could, "You're the best man for the job."

"What do you mean I'm the best man for the job? Do you think Sheryl wouldn't be devastated if I were the one who told her?! I won't be the villain here! I refuse!"

To Ricky, Stan might as well have been telling him the worst joke ever.

Even if his mother had been at odds with Sheryl and Irene, there was no doubt that his mother had done more than her fair share of mistakes.

And after he spent a lot of time with Sheryl and Irene, he could feel that they were generally kind, and long since considered them family. Sheryl had since become a mother figure as well... but if he told her that Irene was dead, she would die weeping!

"Can't we hide it?" Ricky certainly believed that silence was the better idea here.

"Do you really think we can hide a person's death?" Stan asked, holding his gaze. "Well, maybe we can

lie to her for a couple days or months, but do you think we can keep going for a year? I'm asking you because that's the best for everyone."

Ricky did not really see his point. "Why?"

"Irene's death is a devastating tragedy for you and everyone. No one wanted this to happen, but it did—but we are obliged to live on, because we're alive. That's why I want you to tell Sheryl right now, or Isaac would sink into another fit of depression if she starts crying around him in a few days, just as he starts to recover."

"What, you think Isaac could forget my sister in days? She even had a baby with him! He's so ruthless, getting over her after just a few days..."

"I'm just giving an example there." Stan wanted to roll his eyes at Ricky—did this boy really have such poor comprehension?

On the other hand, Ricky was staring at Stan as if he was an idiot. "And do you think Sheryl could bear the pain? It will stay with her for the rest of her life, and if you don't want her sad around Isaac, you should ask her to not show up around him at all."

"She's babysitting Tommy. It's impossible to stop them from meeting..."

"Pain is inevitable, but holding it in and then letting everything blow up at once is nothing good either," Ricky countered.

Stan actually did a double take and chuckled. "I didn't think you'd be this reasonable, kid."

"It's the truth. We're all going to hurt together if we can't hide the truth."

Three days later, Stan had completed renovations of the castle into a snowy fortress—one would feel as if they set foot in the North Pole the instant they entered.

Having worked for Isaac for a while now, Stan certainly knew the man, and he had done so well that Isaac could not even nitpick.

Meanwhile, much had happened over the last three days.

Sheryl had been weeping repeatedly, passing out frequently after being told about Irene's death. She was now admitted to a hospital, and she had become much skinnier after going two days without food or drink.

As for Lulu, she had rushed over to Cloud City looking for Ricky the day he hung up on her, worried that he would go out of line. That was how she found out about Irene.

At the same time, Isaac had not spoken a word.

Today would have counted as a funeral, but it was somehow also not the case.

There was a small group of people gathering to mourn her, watching her ice casket from afar since Isaac did not allow them near it.

They were all people who used to be close to Irene, but within the silent room, only Lulu's quiet sobs could be heard, while the others mourned in silence.

Zachary Slate was present too, and it was natural since he was close with both Irene and Isaac.

Still, he came alone without bringing Ember Lindt.

Half an hour later, James gestured for everyone to leave the mansion.

While Ricky left to get Lulu a drink, Zachary walked up to Lulu, saying, "You shouldn't keep crying, Lulu. You're going to hurt your throat--"

Lulu had turned and left him before he could finish, clearly intent on avoiding him.

Zachary frowned, but he was not in a mood to start a fight.

He said calmly, "Even if we can't get married or be friends, are you still going to do this to me on a day like this?"

Lulu wheeled on him and held his gaze. "I don't want to talk to you, and don't try to talk to me about yourself for the day.

"About me?" Zachary started to feel annoyed.

Wiping off a pinch of tears, Lulu glared at him. "I lost my job. Even if it wasn't you, it would definitely be your mother. Neither of you have my spite, however, because neither of you are worth the trouble. So please shut up and don't try to talk to me about anything—not even my stupid past—while I'm mourning Irene!"