

## Runaway 441

### Chapter 441

Zachary was stunned. "You lost your job?"

Lulu had already turned to leave, not remotely bothered to answer him.

Zachary was not going to let up so soon, however, and caught her by the wrist.

"Let go!" Lulu exclaimed, appearing utterly disgusted by his touch.

It certainly cut Zachary to the quick-she hated him so much already?

"Do you really think that our past was that stupid?"

Her words were basically a refusal to acknowledge their past relationship, and it was unacceptable to him.

Even if they had broken up, they used to be truly in love.

How could she dismiss it like that?

"What else would it be?" someone suddenly asked.

It was Ricky, who had returned with Lulu's drink, shooting Zachary a glare as he gave it to her.

"You are the one who cheated Lulu, and then doubted her even though she clearly wasn't the one behind the banners, and you made her lose her job too. How despicable can you be? But it's fine—I'll take good care of her, and you don't have to worry. So stay away from her, especially today. My patience has its limits, and I'll beat you up if I have to!"

Lulu quickly pulled Ricky away, not wanting anything to do with Zachary, let alone argue with him.

As for Zachary, even if he did not believe that Lulu was the one behind the banners, it must be his mother who got her fired.

Even he decided that he could not deny it-and was there any meaningful difference, whether it was him or his mother?

All he could do was watch as Lulu left... just as a hand suddenly clapped him heavily on the shoulder twice. "You're married, so try to keep it in your pants. Be nice to your new bride instead of bothering Ms. Adams all the time."

"I'm bothering her? Is that how you see it?" Zachary turned and shot a dirty look at the man beside him.

James blinked. "Is that not the case?"

"Of course not! I know we've broken up, but I'm not really bothering her. I mean, can't we at least be friends? Can't friends show concern for each other?"

"Exactly. You've broken up with her, so how are you going to be friends?" James told him earnestly.

"There's no way it's happening. Just lead your separate lives and be content about it."

Zachary was left fuming and storming off.

Ember Lindt certainly knew how to curry Mrs. Slate's favor. Though she was from a rich family and was just a newlywed bride, her work was absolutely immaculate.

As she brought Mrs. Slate a bowl of chicken soup to Mrs. Slate, she cooed, "I'm sorry that Zachary is always so busy, Paula, but I promise to take care of you in his stead."

Mrs. Slate's grin could not have been broader. "Oh, you didn't have to—you could've just left this to the cooks. You were your parents' beloved child, and I shouldn't make you work now that you've married into our family."

Ember lowered her head with a faint smile, as if embarrassed, and kept charming Mrs. Slate. "It's no trouble. You've been taking good care of me too, Paula."

That was when Zachary returned home and saw them, and he immediately told Ember, "Go upstairs."

He was not watching his tone as he was already furious.

"What's wrong, Zachary?" Ember walked up to him and tried to calm him instead.

"I need to talk to my mom. Go upstairs!" he repeated, even more stern now.

Mrs. Slate got to her feet and told Ember calmly. "Ember, go upstairs for now."

Ember had every intention to act the part of a tame, obedient wife and daughter-in-law, and so had to go upstairs.

However, she felt uneasy not knowing what Zachary would discuss with Mrs. Slate.

As she headed upstairs, she hid near the stairway to eavesdrop, pretending to open and close the door to her room to trick those who were downstairs! Soon, she heard Zachary talking...

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Zachary demanded, "You're the one who got Lulu fired, aren't you?"

Ember could clearly hear his voice from upstairs!

Mrs. Slate scoffed. "You call that a job? And yes, I framed her for a mistake and got her fired. She was the one who humiliated us with those banners at your wedding, and her behavior will only escalate if I don't straighten her out."

Ember was naturally smug when she heard that—Mrs. Slate now hated Lulu to the bone, did she not?

"Do you have any evidence it was her?" Zachary snapped.

"Evidence? She admitted it herself!" Mrs. Slate shot back, furious that Zachary was still thinking about Lulu. "You're married, Zachary—you should be caring about Ember. Her family background matches ours, and she is the Lindts' only daughter. It's not just an individual marriage, but a marriage between families! Don't you understand how lucky you are?"

Zachary had always known that his mother loved money and influence, and his father's philandering ways left her suffering considerably.

That was why he gave in to her demands to break up with Lulu.

And yet, she was not stopping...

"I've already compromised on Lulu and even resigned as a doctor to marry Ember. Don't harass Lulu ever again after I did everything you told me to," Zachary told her just then

"If she stays away, I would have no reason to," Mrs. Slate said, since she knew better than to push her own son too far.

Meanwhile, Ember was left clenching on the scaffolding as she stood upstairs.

Zachary still cared so much about Lulu?

What did she have to do for Zachary to only think of her? Lulu's disappearance, perhaps?

Meanwhile, Zachary appeared despondent. "I hope you keep your word, Mom, or you're going to make me appear less than a man to others."

"What, did Lulu come to you? Did she say that you're not a man?" Mrs. Slate raised a brow, at once wary and annoyed.

Zachary gave her a look of helplessness and misery. "Don't worry, she won't come to me ever again- she's disgusted with me."

"Who does she think she is?!" Mrs. Slate snapped, eternally convinced that it was Lulu who did not deserve her son. "She's a measly jinx who works with dead people, and she's disgusted with you? The nerve!"

"Everyone's job has a purpose, Mom. Without law enforcement to keep the peace, your money would have been taken away, whether by kidnapping or even blackmailing. You're only leading a stable, peaceful life because of those who do their jobs without complaint."

Mrs. Slate was left fuming. "What are you saying? That I would be poor if not for the likes of her?!"

Zachary, however, stayed quiet and turned to leave, because he did not want to argue.

"Stop," Mrs. Slate huffed. "Go upstairs and check on Ember. You're already here anyway."

Zachary turned stiffly around and held his mother's gaze like a puppet devoid of emotion. "Aren't you going to drug me again? So that I'll sleep with her?"

Mrs. Slate glowered. "Watch your mouth!"

Zachary simply snorted in disdain and headed upstairs, although there was no telling whom he actually felt disdain for.

As he entered the bedroom, Ember, who was sitting on the bed, quickly got up when she saw him, flashing that innocent smile of hers.

"Is something wrong, Zachary? You don't look well."

Zachary shook his head. "I'm fine."

"Then why the long face?" Ember pointed out, and went up to pull him along to the bed. "Here, sit. Let me give you a massage."

Zachary did so, and she knelt behind him to massage his shoulders. "I should learn this properly next time, so that I can relieve you if you get tired, n

"You don't have to," Zachary said.

"I should, because we are married," she said shyly.

"Sorry for what happened before..." Zachary began.

However, Ember quickly cut him short and wrapped her arms around his neck. "It's not your fault, Zachary. I wanted it anyway- I've always loved you. She had always been interested in Zachary, or she would not have played along with Mrs. Slate's machinations.

At the same time, Zachary closed his eyes.

He did not love Ember, but he could not bear to hurt an innocent girl either.

Stephen received a call from Irene to tidy up everything she left back in her desk drawer back at Melville Hospital.

She had already gone abroad, but she left so urgently she only remembered after the fact that she left a mess back home.

It was no big deal, however, and Stephen quickly agreed to it.

However, just as he headed to her office, he found all the other doctors standing outside in the walkway.

Frowning, he asked, "What's everyone doing out here?"

One of them pointed inside, and Stephen looked into the office in turn...

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Stephen almost lost his footing the instant he saw Isaac inside the office.

What was he doing here?!

Pulling the doctor aside, he asked softly, "When did he get here?"

"Just now," the doctor replied. "He chased everyone out the instant he arrived. I think he's gathering Dr. Spencer's belongings."

Carr became flustered-irene repeatedly emphasized the importance that he gathered her belongings.

What was he supposed to do now?

"Is there something wrong, Dr. Carr?" The doctor noticed the look on his face.

Stephen quickly shook his head. "It's nothing. Also, all of you should go about your business instead of standing around.

The doctors dispersed, while Stephen, feeling too guilty to talk to Isaac, turned to leave as well.

He would never dare.

A quietness loomed amid the rows of desks in the office, and Isaac was the only one seated there, at Irene's seat.

There were stacks of books, research papers, patient medical histories, and various receipts on the table.

Only one photo frame stood on top along with those stacks: a simple doodle of Tommy by Irene herself.

In the doodle, the baby was grinning broadly, which revealed his two little baby teeth while he drooled out the corner of his mouth. His little eyes were spirited and were curling into crescents from his grin, even sparkling like stars.

Isaac picked up the photo frame and studied it—it was well drawn, and obvious that Irene put her heart in it.

A doctor who painted, and was good at it.

She wielded a scalpel, but was also a master of the piano.

Her slim figure as she went into the rhythm of a dance was mesmerizing.

That was the woman who suddenly came into her life without a warning, stealing his heart... only to leave him in such a terrible fashion.

Isaac would have been convinced that it was all just a dream if not for Tommy.

Thud!

A pen suddenly rolled off the desk and dropped to the floor.

Isaac reached down for it when he saw another drawer and pulled it.

Inside was the notebook Stephen gave Irene, aligned with an envelope.

Who still sent written letters in this day and age? And to her, no less?

Putting away the pen, he picked up the letter, his fingers hovering over it for a while before quickly opening it, even as he wondered if Irene kept other secrets from him.

The thought seemed to hasten him, and he started reading.

Dear Irene,

I got your name from Stephen, and I hope you wouldn't mind. I thought long and hard before writing to you, and I have so much to say but don't know where to start. I was so surprised to find out that you're Isaac's wife. I never knew that he was married!

Anyway, I should get to the point. I regained all my memories after my second surgery.

Even so, I never exposed Mick, and feigned ignorance as I stayed with him.

That meant abandoning my own son, which made me a failure of a mother.

The fact that I never went looking for Isaac after I recovered means I've done an injustice to Isaac and Andrew.

But I'm only human, and I fell for Mick as I lived with him.

My change of heart made me afraid to confront the past, let alone face my own son.

That is why I'm writing to you—to ask you to take care of him.

The Jefferson family lacks warmth, and the years he lived until now must have been difficult.

But if he was denied that in the first half of his life, I wish you'll give him a family for the remainder. I could see that you are as kind as you are affectionate, and I would have no worries if you're the one caring for him. I know that the next surgery poses a serious risk, and I have no idea if I could survive it.

Naturally, this shall become my will if the worst happens.

Also, the ring—it's the one Andrew bought me when I married him.

I've always wanted my daughter-in-law to have it, but did not expect to pass it to you under these circumstances.

Also, please keep this letter a secret. I would rather Isaac not know I turned my back on him and his father.

I would rather he believed that I was with Mick because I lost my memory.

If I die on the surgical table and Isaac goes after Mick, please intervene. I owe Mick that much.

A life for a life.

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Isaac stared at the letter for a long while without moving, as if he was frozen stiff. He was simply staggered... To think that Yvaine Lynd had written such a letter to Irene! He certainly never expected his mother to remember everything but not come back to him because she fell in love with Mick

Gooding!

Haha... the irony! His mother fell in love with another man. Did she even think what that made of his father?

His fingers clenched, and the paper crumpled in his grasp.

Stephen was mentioned in the letter...

Rising to his feet, he stormed toward Stephen's office.

Stephen looked up the instant he opened his office door and quickly rose to his feet when he saw that it was Isaac.

While he had weathered his fair share of drama with patients and their families over the years, he felt pure, gripping fear around Isaac.

Perhaps because he was feeling guilty and hid a lot of things from the man, he did not dare to meet Isaac's gaze.

Even as he kept his eyes elsewhere, he asked, "Is there a problem, Mr. Jefferson?"

Isaac remained quiet, and he slowly and steadily walked toward Stephen.

Stephen felt a suffocating pressure weighing down on Isaac each step he took, and the air in his small office suddenly seemed thinner.

"What is it?" Stephen asked anxiously, but that was when he noticed the letter Isaac was holding, and sharply spotted Mick

Gooding's name on it.

What?!

He quickly looked up at Isaac just then, murmuring, "What..."

"How did Yvaine Lynd die?" Isaac asked very quietly, but anyone listening attentively could hear that there was rage in his words that could erupt at any moment.

He was certainly smart enough to catch the gist of the letter.

On the other hand, while Stephen did not know how much Isaac knew or if he found out about everything, the fact that he came to demand an explanation made it obvious that he knew certain facts.

With Mick brought overseas to recover and Irene herself abroad too, it was time he took responsibility.

Breathing a deep sigh, he said, 'Til tell you everything."

Still, he did not know where to start, and paused for a moment to put together the right words.

"It all began over ten years ago, when Mick saved your mother. He brought her and came to me, begging me to save her.

"He and I used to go way back, so I agreed to it.

"However, he was worried that your mother would return to the Jeffersons after she woke up, and that they would keep hurting her if she did.

"That was why he asked me to make her lose her memories-which I did through surgery.

"And once she recovered without remembering the past, Mick gave her a new identity and took her abroad.

"They returned this year, because the thing in her head became life threatening and she needed another surgery. Unlike the two surgeries she had before, we were supposed to remove it this time, and she would regain her memories once we did.

"Mick, worried that she would leave him, hesitated instead of agreeing to it right away.

"He eventually agreed to it, but she suddenly suffered a massive hemorrhage in the brain, and it was too late by the time she was rushed here. Any surgery at that point would mean nothing.

"Unsurprisingly, she died.

"There was a chance that she might have survived if Mick didn't hesitate.

"I was worried that you would retaliate against him, and therefore decided to cover up the issue as a surgical mistake, even asking Irene to be our scapegoat.

"Although she was in the OR with us, I only called her there because I knew Yvaine wouldn't make it. It was pointless, but she tried her damndest to save Yvaine anyway.

"At first, Irene refused to be our scapegoat, but soon agreed to it afterwards for some reason.

"Naturally, I had to work on Yvaine's body afterward so that you didn't notice that anything was wrong.

"As a doctor, and having my specialized knowledge, I know enough on what to do to deceive a forensic doctor and any personnel from the field.

"To no surprise, the outcome of your investigation was that it was a surgical mishap.

"That is all there is to it.

"I was helping a friend, but I also violated my ethics as a doctor. If I am told to face the consequences, I will meet it head-on."

Naturally, Isaac knew the earlier parts of what Stephen told him. He just did not know that Yvaine's death had nothing to do with Irene at all.

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Irene agreed to be the scapegoat implicated with Yvaine's death.

And it was all because Yvaine had written her letter, asking her to save Mick.

She just wanted to carry out Yvaine's will, only for Isaac to misunderstand and give her the silent treatment.

How miserable must she have felt? She could not tell him anything because Yvaine told her not to, leaving her to suffer it all alone!

"My selfishness led to this. I shouldn't have asked someone innocent to take the fall just to save a friend, and cause a misunderstanding between you and her. I'm sorry-"

"Sorry?" Isaac scoffed. "Did you think that's going to cut it?!"

Stephen did not dare to say a word in response-it was true, a mere sorry was not going to cut it.



"Violated your ethics as a doctor', was it? Then you shouldn't keep your job, or you'll insult the profession," Isaac growled before turning to leave.

He then stopped at the doorway, and added without looking back, "People like you don't deserve anything."

With that, he strode out, just as James arrived.

He was worried, and quickly hurried to Isaac when he saw him. "Mr. Jefferson."

Isaac handed James the letter he was holding, and kept walking as he said, "Take everything that belonged to her."

James took the letter, scanned through it, and quickly answered, "Yes, sir."

He personally did it himself, returning the letter to its envelope and carried it away along with everything else Irene owned.

Isaac never returned home ever since Irene's death-it was not until he saw her sketch of Tommy that he turned his thoughts to his own son.

She might be gone, but it was not as if she left him with nothing.

Both their blood flowed in their son's veins!

"Mah-mah... Mah-mah..." Tommy was mumbling over Sheryl's shoulder.

It was all he had been mumbling for a while now, perhaps because he missed Irene.

Isaac entered the room just then, and said quietly, "Let me carry him."

Sheryl turned and handed Tommy over when she saw that it was Isaac.

Her eyes were swollen-she must have been crying again, and there was no hiding that redness even if she tried.

As Isaac carried Tommy back to his bedroom, Sheryl felt tears welling in her eyes again as she watched them go.

She headed to the kitchen, blinking back her tears.

Mrs. Watson was afraid to say anything too-the house had been gloomy for a while now.

"Isaac hasn't been eating much since Irene left," Sheryl said quietly. "Let's cook him something, or he's going to fall apart too."

Mrs. Watson nodded. "Yes, of course."

It had certainly been worrying for Mrs. Watson as she watched Isaac visibly turning haggard and losing weight.

He was the one who felt most miserable, but he had to keep everything pent up inside and not weep like the rest of the women.

Mrs. Watson heaved a sigh and wondered how reality could be so cruel.

She was soon done cooking, and Sheryl took everything out to the dining table.

As Isaac brought Tommy out to eat with them, she tried to talk to him, only to find herself losing her voice soon enough.

Isaac was staring at Tommy.

He looked just like himself, but there was also a sliver of resemblance to Irene.

Isaac's eyes were beady, but his gaze was distant.

"Irene wouldn't want to see you like this if she's still alive," Sheryl finally said then. "It would break her heart so... and you have to stay strong for Tommy too. You're his father, and he's still just a baby."

"Yeah," Isaac replied ever so softly.

Meanwhile, Irene was settling down abroad.

Stephen had arranged for her to travel with another person's passport, and when she was better, she could start her term at Mead Clinic.

There, she could learn in peace and keep developing her career.

She was staying at a studio apartment, and it was enough for her to stay alone although it was quite compact.

She also felt comfortable despite the new surroundings, and she felt as if she was given a new life.

After giving up on all that had been weighing her down, she could now freely chase after her dreams.

If love was not to be, career it was.

She was using mild medication for her facial burns, along with some scar cream safe for pregnant women.

Naturally, the effect was limited, but she would rather not appear too horrid a sight.

She had every reason to put on a face mask, but she could not avoid human interaction.

When she did have to talk to people, she would rather not scare them.

Since she had just arrived there and was still jet-lagged, she quickly went to sleep.

However, someone knocked on her door before she dozed off.

Who could it be? She opened the door amid the confusion...

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When the door opened and Irene saw the person standing outside, she exclaimed in surprise, "You?!"

"Stephen contacted me and gave me your address," Mick Gooding told her. "He wants someone to take care of you, since you've just arrived and probably not used to this place."

Irene did not let him in immediately-naturally, she had her concerns.

"Don't worry," Mick assured her. "Stephen told me everything-your secret is safe with me."

It was only then that Irene let him in.

While Mick survived a car crash, he was injured considerably. It was only thanks to the advancement of medical technology that he made a full recovery.

Even so, Yvaine's death still hit him badly-he looked much older now, and the tip of his hair was turning white, as if he aged a decade in an instant.

After Mick entered, he gave Irene a business card. "Here's my number and address. Contact me if you need help."

Irene took it out of politeness. "Thank you."

"You don't have to. I mean, didn't you come here because you helped me, and got into an argument with Isaac?" Mick asked.

Irene shook her head. "No, it's our own problem-it has nothing to do with you."

"Then may I ask the reason?"

Irene stayed silent, clearly reluctant to tell him.

Knowing that he had stepped out of line, Mick said, "Alright, just pretend I never I never asked."

Irene smiled faintly then, but she clearly appeared enfeebled-she was tired and wanted to rest.

Mick saw that, and got to his feet. "I'll check on you again next time."

Irene walked him out.

Time passed in the blink of an eye, and Irene had now been abroad for six months, getting used to the climate and the work hours.

Things went smoothly at work too-she had been singled out and even harassed, but her enthusiasm and diligence for medicine slowly earned everyone's approval.

While she worked, she started to further study Minervese. She had been fluent before, but she still needed to learn more especially if she wanted to apply it with medical jargon as well.

In truth, she knew more than a handful of foreign languages. She was forced to study it even if she did not want to and had no time for it, but Lionel Spencer had told her to do it or he would stop her from taking her exams for a medical license.

Lionel had always wanted her to marry into the Jefferson family. From his perspective, a woman who could win a man's heart had to be learned in the arts, though knowledge and socializing skills would also play a vital role in the case of a more successful man, since any woman would be an embodiment of her husband's prestige.

Lionel certainly had vision, rating his own daughter highly from the start and insisting that she win Isaac over.

He would have been pleased if he was not dead, since his plan worked-he just did not live to see Isaac fall for the daughter he groomed with such painstaking effort.

It was very late and Irene was still in front of her desk, which was piling with stacks of books and notes.

Her hair was loose, hiding her gruesome burn scars so that she only showed the flawless side of her face.

There was a tender look in her eyes beneath the faint glow of the table light, and she put down her pen to put a hand on her bulging belly, while she stared at her calendar.

It would soon be Tommy's birthday, and her clock jingled just then, indicating that it was now 12 AM.

She constantly missed her baby and thought of him often, and the arrival of his birthday made him miss her further.

She then picked up her phone, her fingers clenching over it for a moment as she hesitated, but made the call!

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Irene's call was soon answered. "Is there a problem? Why are you calling at this hour? It must be midnight over there..."

Irene had been keeping contact with Stephen over the last six months, and he occasionally took photos or videos of Tommy there.

In fact, he recently sent her a video of Tommy, but she was now calling him again, intent on asking for more favors despite it although she would be asking too much.

But it was Tommy's birthday.

"Why aren't you saying anything?" Stephen noticed her silence. "Like I said, I've already gathered the stuff you left on your desk."

Stephen did not dare to tell her the truth. Knowing that she would get worried, he decided to just tell her

that she took everything- she was not going to find out from over there anyway.

Irene said softly, "I know, but that's not what I'm asking about. It's my son's birthday..."

"It took me over a month to get that video for you," Stephen told her.

It was certainly difficult for Stephen to reach Tommy, what with Sheryl and Mrs. Watson watching, as well as the bodyguards keeping watch.

"I won't impose, then," Irene said, understanding his point.

Stephen realized then that he was a little harsh, and sighed. "Sorry, I've just retired and I'm not in a pleasant mood. I shouldn't have thought like that."

"But you're not at the age to retire," Irene pointed out.

Stephen wondered if he could tell her right then that it was all because of Isaac.

All the merit and honors he earned over his career was all gone now.

The man was certainly as ruthless as he was unforgiving!

Irene seemed to pick up on what he was thinking, too. "Is Isaac harassing you because he found out?"

"No, I'm just getting tired. I could use the time to spend with my family too," Stephen said, but even the look on his face said otherwise.

He appeared haggard, since his life's work was gone in a snap.

Nonetheless, he changed the subject and asked, "How are things over there?"

"Yeah, I'm fine, and work is going smoothly too," Irene replied. "I'll have my papers published next month too."

"I'll make sure to read it," Stephen told her—he had been keeping a constant eye on her.

It had just been six months, but Irene had improved and enriched her knowledge so much he could barely keep up.

After a few more exchanges, they hung up, and Irene lay in bed, watching the video Stephen sent her repeatedly.

It was a video of Isaac alighting from a car with Tommy in his arms.

It was just a split second, but the video clearly captured Isaac's towering figure and his chiseled face.

He was still his mesmerizing self in the months they had been apart.

Tommy was content with staying in his arms, and was grinning broadly.

Irene smiled as well—her baby was doing fine with Isaac.

Putting away her phone, she looked outside the window as faint moonlight spilled in, illuminating her face.

The clear illumination over the wrinkled, scarlet burn scars on her right cheek was exceedingly gruesome.

As she slowly closed her eyes, a crystalline tear trickled off the corner of her eye and disappeared in her pillow.

Mick arrived when Irene was going to leave her apartment in the morning, asking, "Would you be home early?"

She had been spending most of her time at work in Mead Clinic and always returned home late.

In fact, he did not get to see her much at all.

Irene did not answer directly, and instead asked, "What is it?"

Mick hesitated before saying, "I have a favor to ask-just a month ago, I managed to secure seats for myself and Erin at an auction, but she had to go abroad and I don't have a suitable replacement..."

"Can't you go alone?" Irene asked.

"No," Mick said. "I won't be allowed in if I go alone."

"I might be busy..."

"I know you're not. You just don't want to leave the house," Mick said, exposing her right then.

Irene took off her mask then, revealing the burn scars on her face and held his gaze. "Don't think I'm the right person for that."

"You can wear a mask," Mick pointed out.

Seeing that he was insistent, Irene had to agree to it. "Alright."

Mick smiled then. "I'll pick you up after work when it's time."

"Okay."

The day passed quickly and Mick was already waiting when Irene stepped out of the hospital.

He lowered the window and beckoned. "Over here."

Irene got in and they headed straight to the auction center.

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In the car, Mick told Irene, "There's going to be a lot of expensive antiques, jewelry, and other items at the auction. Tell me if you see anything you like, and I'll get it for you."

He then added, "I don't mean anything by this. You were Yvaine's daughter-in-law, and I already think of you as my daughter."

Irene smiled. "I'm not really interested in all that stuff."

"I see... Actually, I collect old books and antiques, and Yvaine used to attend these auctions with me..."

Misery showed on his face once he mentioned Yvaine, and Irene changed the subject. "Are the people attending rich?"

Average Joes would not be able to afford anything from such auctions after all.

"Yeah," Mick replied. "They are expecting rich people from across the world, n

Irene nodded-such auctions were a pastime for the wealthy.

They happened to arrive at the auction center just then, and they saw the many luxury cars parked outside.

Irene was almost able to recognize most, since many of them were limited editions which Isaac owned as well.

He never drove them much, however, but it was probably the same principle as women buying more clothes than they needed.

Mick led Irene towards the checkpoint at the entrance. Since he had been a frequent guest, he entered easily.

He told them that Irene was his daughter, and since he brought his own daughter here before as well, the people at the checkpoints were respectful toward Mick.

They were clearly acquainted, too...

"You could have made it in without me, couldn't you?" Irene was certain of it despite asking.

"Guess the cat's out of the bag," Mick chuckled. "Sorry, but you looked like you were tired, so I'm bringing you out to get some rest and relaxation. Erin really went abroad, though... I asked her to look for the place where Yvaine was buried."

Irene told him, "You won't ever find her if he doesn't want you to, y'know."

Mick turned to raise a brow at her. "You really know him, I see."

"More or less-especially that temper of his," she replied.

Soon, they arrived at their seats.

Many people had already arrived.

Then, Mick suddenly said, "Erin isn't my biological daughter."

Irene was certainly stunned as he told her that out of the blue, her bright eyes widening over her face mask as she stared at him, blinking.

Mick sighed. "It's perhaps my greatest regret in life, but we couldn't have a child. She's sick, and I have a missing kidney."

While the doctors had told him that he could have a child, Yvaine's body could not.

"We adopted Erin from an orphanage and raised her like our own," Mick finished.

Irene did remember Yvaine telling her that her daughter, Erin Gooding, was already twenty, even though she was with Mick for less time than that.

The numbers did not match... but it was because Erin was adopted.

Mick then said, "Since she left to find Yvaine's grave, there's a chance he might run into Isaac. Aren't you afraid?"

Irene knew what he was getting at. "He has the right to choose his own lover."

She reared her head-she had her pride too. She loved him, and it hurt her to leave him.

However, she did not want him to give him so much because of Tommy.

Since he did not love her, she was willing to give him freedom instead of using their son to coerce him. It was one of the reasons she left him.

Mick looked at her admiringly then. "You're as stubborn as you're strong."

Irene smiled. "I'll take that as a compliment."

"It is... But I guess I was different," Mick sighed. "I seized what I loved because I was possessive, even if she didn't love me."

Irene, who actually knew how Yvaine felt, said, "Maybe she did."

Mick smiled and simply dismissed it as Irene trying to sweet-talk him.

While they were conversing, the auction was now fully seated.

That was when Irene unwittingly looked ahead, and saw the man sitting in Seat 33. Her face fell right then!

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Irene panicked and quickly turned away, fearful that she would be recognized.

Mick noticed that, and shifted his body to keep her hidden, while asking quietly, "What's wrong?"

"A familiar face," Irene replied softly, even as she slid another peek at the man.

There was no mistaking it—that was Harvey Gooding.

She never expected him to show up there!

Nonetheless, Mick told her, "Don't worry. He's not going to notice—the hall is quite dimly lit and you're wearing a mask."

Irene was actually just too surprised to see Harvey there and became nervous. Still, she quickly calmed down, and thought to herself that he would not notice her since she was sitting behind him.

Moreover, he probably would not recognize her after what had happened to her face anyway.

Soon, the auction began, with the host giving a simple speech before proceeding to the auction proper.

Most items auctioned for the day could be categorized into an assortment of antiques and jewelry, with the first one being a tapestry.

It was a regular auction, but there was no assurance offered that the auctioned items were genuine—the attendants had to rely on their abilities for appraisals and prior experience.

Mick appeared calm, seemingly uninterested in the tapestry.

Irene did not know how this stuff worked, but she was here anyway, and simply watched how things went.



Mick then told her, "Most of the items they lead with tend to be trinkets not even worth collecting, since they would save the best for last. Moreover, I've attended enough auctions to know that there will always be a couple of irreplaceable treasures, and I heard through the grapevine that there's a castle to be sold too."

Irene raised a brow and whispered, "They auction buildings too?"

"Of course!" Mick chuckled. "It's supposedly the estate of a Fraconian noble's heir, and he's selling it to cover his losses."

Their voices somehow drew Harvey's attention just then.

He turned around, and frowned when he saw the woman wearing a face mask.

What was all the mystery about?

He actually became curious.

On the other hand, Irene quickly looked downward when she spotted Harvey looking at her, and then turned away, using the excuse of looking at the auctioneer as he accepted a bid.

The second item was soon brought forward: an emerald brooch of significant clarity.

Mick was clearly interested, but did not make a bid.

That was when the attendants sitting near the entrance became restless, seemingly because someone important just arrived.

Irene turned to find a towering figure striding through the path between the seats.

It was him. He was here.

Irene actually forgot to breathe.

The host had saved the best seat for him, and was fawningly leading him to it.

Mick saw him too, and turned to find Irene getting so nervous her entire body had turned stiff.

Nudging her on the arm, he told her, "If you're worried about being noticed, we can leave right now."

Irene's gaze, however, was already locked in his direction.

His face was rather blurred under the dim lights overhead, and she could not actually see him since he was very far.

She could not help wanting to see him, and so quietly replied, "We're already here. Let's leave when the auction is over."

It had been six months—over 200 days—since she last saw him, the man who appeared in her dreams so many times.

There might be no other chance.

Meanwhile, Mick did not make a bid for the emerald brooch either, and they proceeded to the third item: an antique vase.

The crowd was whispering to each other as most of them appeared interested.

At the same time, Harvey was glancing at Isaac from time to time.

It actually looked as if he was not attending the auction to get anything, but just to keep an eye on Isaac.

As for Irene, all her heart and eyes were fixed upon that face she had not seen for so long. She worked hard to restrain herself, but there was no hiding the look of love.

Halfway through the auction, she got up and said, "I need the ladies' room."

She quietly left, heading into the washroom and splashing her face repeatedly with cold water to calm herself and clear her head.

It was after a long while that she calmed down a little.

However, the instant she stepped out, she found Isaac standing near the glass wall of the lobby, conversing with a foreigner.

She was too far away to hear what they were talking about, and she could only see that his expression was impassive, even cold-which stopped her from discerning his mood.

Still, he seemingly sensed someone watching him and he turned toward her direction.

Irene saw that and quickly turned around, but knocked into someone as she panickedly tried to leave!

"Sorry!" she said in apology as she looked up.

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The man's tall frame was blocking Irene's path and his shadow shrouded her.

It was a familiar face, too-because it was Harvey.

Irene quickly lowered her head, but Harvey was keeping his eyes fixed on her, as if he wanted to see through her mask.

"Who are you?" he demanded. 'I noticed back at the hall that you've been peeking at Isaac Jefferson-who is he to you? Why are you watching him so intently?"

"You're mistaken," Irene said quietly, avoiding his gaze even as she tried to leave.

Harvey was relentless, however, and intercepted her again. "Sneaking around as if you're afraid to let people see you? Are you a fugitive or something?"

This time, as he spoke, he suddenly reached out and pulled off Irene's face mask, catching her off guard.

"Hey!" she exclaimed in surprise, and quickly threw her hands over her face.

Beneath the lights overhead, the burn scars over her cheek and neck were revealed in their entirety.

Harvey actually flinched in shock.

"My god, you're ugly!" he cried, before turning toward Isaac nearby and laughing out loud. "Hahaha! Isaac Jefferson, your charm really has no limits -you're attracting the uglies now, too!"

Harvey then turned back toward Irene, suddenly noticed her bulging belly, and frowned. "Hold on... there's a man who got you pregnant? With that face of yours?"

Irene was naturally aware of how grotesque her scars were, but she still found her own knuckles clenching when Harvey called her ugly.

Nonetheless, she kept her head down, pulling up her collar slightly to hide her face and tried to leave again.

This time, Harvey directly grabbed her wrist and said, "What's the hurry? Afraid to be caught peeking?"

That was when Isaac started to walk toward them and Irene's heart raced faster with every step he advanced toward them.

Beckoning at him, Harvey called out loudly, "Did you notice? This ugly person has been peeking at you for a while now... Or maybe you know her? Wait, don't tell me that her baby is yours! Haha..."

Isaac simply gave him a look of cold disdain. "I actually think you're the one who's been stalking me."

He then slowly turned toward Irene.

Although he could not actually see behind her mask, Irene panicked and stomped her foot squarely on Harvey's.

"Oof!" He winced, and Irene took the opening to push him away and run away.

As Harvey looked down, he noticed the grayness over his shiny leather shoe, which was left flattened now.

"Shit!" He could not help cursing. "Ugly and violent? I really wonder if she's actually pregnant or if it's asexual reproduction..."

After all, which man could bear to get in bed with such a woman?!

On the other hand, Isaac was staring at the woman as she ran away.

She looked so familiar from behind... It was as if he knew her!

Harvey, too, was watching her, before turning back toward Isaac and seeing the look in his eyes.

"Wait, you're not telling me that you actually tapped that?" His eyes were twitching. "It hasn't been that long since Irene left and you already have a new lover? I mean sure, we're men and philandering is normal for us, but don't you think you should at least find someone with a better face...?"

Isaac simply turned around, ignoring him.

Harvey lost composure right then. Even if he had helped Isaac catch someone who was spying on him, Harvey himself had come to Minerva because of Isaac too.

"So, care to tell me what secret projects you're up to here in Minerva?"

He was intent on pitting himself against Isaac-he doubted that he would always prove to just be second best.

Over the last six months since Irene's passing, Isaac had become even more ruthless and unscrupulous in business. With

Remy's investments now coming under his direct leadership, his business acumen and keen eye on market trends meant he was already earning steady profits from every project he put money on.

He had also acquired Franconia's ST Corp and Globe Airways in quick succession, and the latest rumor Harvey managed to gather was that Isaac had partnered with a tycoon from Duran.

In fact, he had followed Isaac here to see what was going on.

Isaac, however, thought nothing of Harvey-it was the case since the past, as it was now.

"Here are all the concerned documents." The man who had been conversing with Isaac approached them just as they headed for the door and handed him a document envelope.

"What's in there?" Harvey's eyes were fixed on the envelope, wishing he had X-ray vision to see through the envelope and read the document inside.

"Are you a piece of chewing gum, latching onto us wherever we go?" James walked up to them and shot Harvey a cold glare just then, before turning back toward Isaac. "Your car will be arriving soon, sir."

Isaac handed him the envelope. "Get someone to audit this."

"Yes, sir," James replied.

As they returned to the hotel, James put Isaac's medication on the table.

Hesitating for a while, he then asked, "Are we going back tomorrow?"

Isaac was standing in front of the glass wall with his back to James.He unbuttoned his suit and suddenly said, "Go back to the auction center.Get me the security footage they have of the auction tonight."