

## Runaway 531

### Chapter 531

Zachary quickly drove to Aiken Hospital with Ember and arrived to find Debbie waiting alone outside the operating room.

However, Zachary had noticed that conditions there were exceedingly crude, and his brow was deeply creased even as he strode inside.

Even Ember was asking, "Why would they send Mr. Cross here?"

'What are you doing here?" Debbie was actually surprised to see Zachary there.

Zachary said, "Isaac called me."

'L see." Debbie lowered her eyes.

Ember's eyes were locked on her. "You seemed surprised."

Debbie looked up then, but her usual businesslike expression had already returned-she appeared solemn, even a little lofty as if she stood above others. "I'm sure you have a misunderstanding here, missy."

As Isaac's secretary, she certainly had the disposition to belittle others.

After all, there are so many people who wanted just minutes of his time, but they all had to go through her first.

Be that as it may, Ember grew up like a pampered princess and she was not about to suffer Debbie's strut. "Zachary and Isaac are friends, and I'm Zachary's wife. You should show some respect."

Debbie frowned, but Zachary quickly got annoyed too. "Are you really doing this right now?"

Ember quickly turned silent-she had just won Zachary's affection after so much, and the last thing she wanted was to upset him.

Debbie held her tongue since she did not want more trouble either.

"Tell me, what happened? How did he get into a traffic accident?" Zachary asked.

'He was on the way to the airport when his car collided with a dump truck on Ringer Bridge. This was the closest hospital, so we rushed him here."

That served as an explanation for why James was taken to this hospital, and Zachary nodded. "Find the driver of the dump truck. I'll take a look in the OR myself."

Debbie stopped him. "I've already sent our people to find the driver and investigate the accident, but what are you doing? You could cause a mishap during the surgery if you disturb the doctors."

"I'm a doctor-I know what I'm doing," Zachary said, and ignored her obstruction to look for the administrators, introducing himself and soon gaining approval to enter the operating room.

The interior of the operating room was actually a whole new world to him.

Not only were the conditions terrible, but the equipment was crude and ancient too.

James was comatose, and while the doctors were trying to save him, Zachary could see that there was a limit to their ability. James was going to die if they delayed this further.

He quickly made his resolve—even if now was not the time to move James, delaying it any further would be no better.

He called Central Hospital's emergency dispatch.

Having worked there before and knowing the many people who worked there, it was not difficult to get an ambulance to take James to Central Hospital instead.

Outside the operating room, Ember was staring at Debbie.

There was no need for her to hold back since Zachary was not around.

"You knew what would happen before sending Mr. Cross here, didn't you?"

It takes a woman to know a woman—or a scheming woman, to be precise.

That was why Ember could sense that Debbie had ulterior motives.

Debbie, however, simply ignored Ember while she folded her arms across her chest. "Why the silence? Feeling guilty because I saw through you?"

Debbie remained silent, but shot her a cold look this time.

Ember was frustrated that she was ignored, too. A pampered daughter of a rich family like her certainly never suffered such abuse!

People only ever treated her like a princess, and she was naturally left grumpy by Debbie's cold shoulder.

As her face fell, she snorted coolly. "We will all know what you're up to once Mr. Cross wakes up. Don't take everyone for idiots now."

Debbie turned and left, wanting nothing less to stay away from Ember.

That was when her phone jingled.

She whipped it out from her pocket, unlocked it, and saw that she received a text.

[I know you tried to kill James Cross. ]

Debbie's face turned pale right then and she quickly typed a reply.

[Who are you?!]

**Chapter 532**

[You don't have to know who I am. Just know that Ember Lindt suspects you, and you really shouldn't let her stay at large or there's going to be problems]

It was as if the sender had seen everything that happened with their own eyes... Perhaps they were right there!

Debbie quickly looked around and quickly spotted a person dressed in a black trench coat and a baseball cap on the second floor walkway.

Seemingly sensing her gaze, the person quickly turned to leave.

Debbie gave chase, but they were already gone when she reached the second floor. However, she was not giving up just yet-she quickly looked around to find the person when her phone jingled again.

[Don't try to look for me, or I'll tell Isaac Jefferson that you tried to kill James Cross.]

Debbie panicked-who were they? How did they know about Isaac?

She quickly sent a reply.

[What do you want?]

[To help you.]

Debbie scowled. [Do you take me for a fool? You were threatening me a moment ago.]

[You can ignore what I say. I'll tell Isaac Jefferson everything right now.]

[Stop.]

Debbie replied instantly, as if the sender would call Isaac if she were a second too slow.

There was no way she would let Isaac find out about James, or she would never be allowed to stay with him-and that would still be the least of her worries.

[I won't talk, but you'd have to do something about the one who suspects you.]

Debbie was left staring at the text.

The one who suspected her?

But Zachary did not suspect her at all...

His wife, however, was quite suspicious of her, and was just stopping short of saying that she was the one behind James's accident.

[You mean Ember?]

[You know very well who it is.]

Debbie thought about it, but it definitely was just Ember who suspected her.

Isaac was abroad and would not have the time to care about what happened to her.

She also knew a thing or two about Zachary, and he would never suspect her—he was neither calculative nor petty, and he had no reason to suspect her because she had always been close to James.

He was just that 'simple-minded'.

"Hey-Zachary is calling for you," Ember suddenly called out from behind Debbie.

She quickly turned off her screen, clenching her phone in her hand as she slowly turned around.

"Is there a problem?" Debbie asked with calm composure.

Naturally, the people within Isaac's inner circle had their own strengths—for example, Debbie was cool as a cucumber despite her crime.

One would certainly give her that much.

"He's just called an ambulance to take Mr. Cross to another hospital," Ember said coolly.

She did not like Debbie for some reason and the feeling was mutual.

"Understood." Debbie hurried downstairs and stopped Zachary the instant she saw him. "You can't move him—you're just affecting his treatment."

"He's not getting treated here at all—he'll die if he stays!" Zachary retorted, appearing determined.

Debbie's fingers clenched, but she demanded without flinching, "Will you take responsibility for what happens?"

Zachary looked her in the eye, growling every word. "Yes, I will."

With that, he turned to the medical staff behind him. "He's in the OR. I've spoken to the admin already."

Naturally, Debbie was flustered. "Have you thought about this? There's a man's life at stake here."

"Zachary can, just as I'll shoulder the responsibility with him," Ember said, siding with Zachary while firing back, "You, on the other hand, have been stubborn about stopping US. It's like you're up to something."

Zachary agreed with Ember this time. "Yes, Debbie—James is in bad shape, and he really might die if he stays in this hospital with its horrible conditions. Why are you so insistent on stopping me?"

### **Chapter 533**

Debbie held her head high without appearing guilty at all. "James and I go way back. We know each other so well, and everything I'm doing right now is for his sake." If you're not lying," Ember said with a sneer.

Debbie promptly wheeled on her and snapped, "What's your wife's problem, Zachary Slate? She doesn't even know me! Why would I try to hurt James? Even if we can't agree on this, what we want is ultimately the same—for James to be fine. Your wife, on the other end, keeps insinuating that I'd hurt James! So I'm asking you, why would I do that? What good would it do me?!"

Since Debbie had worked under Isaac for a long time, she was close with Stan and James. On the surface, she had no reason to hurt James.

As such, Zachary said, "Forgive her. She doesn't know that you're his friend. =

Meanwhile, the medical staff had wheeled James out of the operating room, and Zachary said, "Let's go."

Debbie glanced at James on the stretcher and remained impassive despite her panic. "Yeah, we should hurry-his treatment shouldn't wait."

Ember pursed her lips. "Really?"

Zachary shot her a glare. "Stop it."

Saving James took priority right now-it was not the time to fight.

Ember had always been wet behind her ears when it came to Zachary- since he had spoken, she quietly followed without a word,

Soon, the ambulance brought James to Central Hospital, and he was immediately wheeled into the operating room for another surgery thanks to Zachary's arrangement.

Zachary was not allowed in because he had resigned, and thus had to wait outside with the others.

Debbie stood very far from them because she lacked composure. Even if James had no idea that she was the one who staged his accident, he would be smart enough to suspect her.

If James really did wake up, she would be exposed at any moment.

Meanwhile, Ember leaned in to whisper into Zachary's ear, "You should keep an eye on Debbie."

Zachary certainly had not been watching Debbie before because he was too worried about James.

He turned toward Debbie just then and saw that she was fidgeting uneasily.

"I think she's feeling guilty," Ember told him.

Zachary rebuked her softly. "Stop it. She would never hurt James."

Ember, however, still felt that Debbie was deliberately interfering with James's treatment. "Why not?"

"Because she has no reason to. They both work for Isaac and have built an understanding over the years. What good would it do her anyway?"

Ember was stumped.

Still, she grumbled under her breath, "How should I know? But I can tell she wants to hurt him."

"You shouldn't say that if you don't have proof," Zachary replied.

Ember turned quiet reluctantly.

It was another hour until the doors of the operating room opened and a nurse stepped out.

"Who is the patient's family member?"

Debbie rushed to the nurse, demanding, "How is he? Is he awake?"

"The doctor is checking on him, but this needs signing," the nurse said as she held out a form to Debbie, asking again, "Who will sign it?"

"I'll sign it," Zachary said, and did so immediately.

Debbie, however, grabbed the nurse's arm and stopped her from leaving. ' Hey! I asked you a question-how is the patient? Is he awake?!"

The nurse replied, 'I don't know. I'm just a nurse."

At the same time, Zachary had to pry Debbie off the nurse. "Calm down."

Realizing that she had lost her cool, Debbie quickly tried to hide it, "How could I? Mr. Jefferson needs him right now, but this has to happen..."

She appeared miserable, and Zachary breathed a sigh. "He's probably fine."

He had faith in the doctors of Central Hospital, but he said that more to assure himself than to assure Debbie.

The light indicator outside the operating room turned off after two hours and the doctor who operated on him stepped out, still in his blue scrubs.

As the doctor took off his face mask, Zachary hurried to him, asking urgently, "How is he, Dr. Wagner?"

At the same time, Debbie was watching closely!

### **Chapter 534**

Dr. Wagner and Zachary were close, and so the former easily agreed to the surgery on short notice. But things appeared ominous at the moment.

"Well, he's safe and breathing..."

Debbie panicked right then and dropped her phone, its screen shattering with a loud crack!

Ember glanced at her, but while she felt that Debbie was obviously acting suspicious, Zachary thought that Debbie was just thrilled. "Don't worry.

James is safe now."

Debbie kept her head down to hide her reaction. "I'm just so happy..."

Dr. Wagner suddenly said, "May I finish?"

"What's wrong? Didn't you say he's saved?" Zachary asked.

"He's breathing, but..." Dr. Wagner was looking Zachary in the eye, but soon sighed. 'I've done my best."

Zachary sensed something ominous. "What is it?"

'He's in a vegetative state...'

"What?" Zachary exclaimed in fear and disbelief.

It was a terrible outcome-the only difference between a person in a vegetative state and a dead person was their breathing!

"We did what we could," Dr. Wagner added.

Even if doctors were used to this, a loved one would have a hard time accepting such an outcome.

Debbie certainly did not expect the sudden reversal-even if James was alive, how was he different from dead, being the vegetable he was?

Someone up there must be watching out for her!

Ember, who had been watching Debbie, saw the look on her face.

Debbie also happened to look up and saw Ember's gaze, and the latter did not flinch-as if telling her 'I saw that'.

Debbie frowned-Ember had been messing with her for a while now, and it seemed that she must not allow her to stay at large.

"What's with that look?" she exclaimed while looking forlorn. "I don't have time to waste with you now after all that."

With that, she walked up to Dr. Wagner. "When can he leave?"

"We're keeping him in the ICU for 48 hours. If there's no issue after that, we will put him in a normal ward," Dr. Wagner replied.

"Thank you," Zachary said, mustering his spirit just then-he knew Dr.

Wagner's ability, and despite how things turned out, Dr. Wagner must have done all he could.

"No. I'm sorry I can't do anything else for him--"

"I know you did your best," Zachary said-their friendship was enough to justify that understanding.

As they watched James being wheeled to ICU, Zachary sat on a bench along the walkway in silence.

"No one wanted this," Ember said, wrapping her arms around him. "It's alright. Everyone did their best."

Zachary turned to look at her just then.

He could not get a read on her at all, and every sign pointed to her being heinous.

Even so, he felt warmth from the comfort she offered at the moment.

"Thank you, Ember."

Ember actually pursed her lips right then.

She could feel Zachary's earnestness and was left so emotional she could burst into tears right then.

"We're married, Zachary," she rasped. "That means we should always look out for each other. I would even take a bullet for you if you're willing to accept me."

Zachary brushed his fingers through her hair. "I don't need you to take a bullet for me, silly."

"I would either way," Ember said. "I'm with you 'till the end of the line." One could only say something like that if they loved another person rotten.

## **Chapter 535**

Though Ember was as rotten as she was a schemer, she was genuinely in love with Zachary.

Meanwhile, Debbie was watching them nearby, finding Ember an eyesore no matter how she looked.

Still, she turned away and whipped out a phone to make a call.

It was soon answered.

"Mr. Jefferson? James is..."

Isaac had just met the Raideens.

In any situation, they would first consider profit and then the big picture, but neither gave them reasons to help Irene.

In fact, she was the reason their profits were hurt—since they were Minervans, and they controlled the interest of Mead Clinic.

Naturally, they told Isaac that they were already doing him a favor by not adding fuel to fire.

Isaac, however, knew that they were just refusing because he did not sweeten the pot enough.

He whipped out his phone, about to make a call, when Debbie's call came. He answered it, but Debbie was stuttering a lot.

"Just tell me already!" he snapped.

"James... is in a vegetative state. He's at the Central Hospital, and Zachary is with him too," Debbie finally said.

The gaze on Isaac's seemingly calm face darkened and his hands flinched slightly.

One could not tell if he was sad, especially since he controlled his voice very well. "I see."

"Don't worry, sir—I'll find the best medical staff we have to take care of him. I'll also report anything that happens at the company right away," Debbie assured him.

With James gone, she was now his right-hand man.

"Yeah," Isaac said, his gaze lowering as he rubbed between his brows. "Get Stan to help if you find yourself overwhelmed."

"Stan would be busy at headquarters. I'm confident I can do well right here."



Debbie was perfectly aware that now was the moment she would make Isaac see her worth.

And she certainly wanted that, instead of being overshadowed by Stan and James.

"Don't worry, Mr. Jefferson-I'll keep a close eye on everything here. Just worry about getting Ms. Spencer back."

Isaac certainly could not split himself and had to leave any issues in Zidonia to Debbie's care.

After he hung up, he took a moment to calm down before calling Auric Wes.

"Yes, I wish to set up a meeting."

The one on the end was not Auric, but they soon answered, "Yes, Mr. Jefferson. Mr. Wes has agreed to a meeting."

"Good," Isaac growled, hung up, and turned to his chauffeur. "Book the next flight to Duran."

"Yes, Mr. Jefferson."

With that, Isaac closed his eyes.

It appeared as if he was resting his eyes, but he was actually trying to stop himself from an emotional outburst.

His furrowed brow was a clear indicator that he was not calm at the moment!

After hanging up, Debbie put away her phone and started to leave when

Zachary called out to her.

"Just leave James to me. I know the people who work here, so it's more convenient if I'm the one to make arrangements."

Debbie could not ask for more-she would rather spend time doing Isaac's bidding now that James was no threat to her.

"I'm counting on you," she replied.

"It's what I should do," Zachary said. "We're close friends."

"Yeah. I'll be going now-I have other work to do,"

With that, Debbie turned, clearly reluctant to stay a moment longer.

However, she barely moved a step when she heard Ember speaking behind her!

### **Chapter 536**

Ember had a look of utter contempt. "You keep insisting that you are close with Mr. Cross, but you're in such a hurry to leave him already? You hardly look like you're mourning, too-are you really a friend to Mr. Cross as you kept claiming?"

Debbie narrowed her eyes at Ember for seconds, but ultimately kept quiet and strode off, bearing with her snide remarks.

After all, she knew that arguing or explaining would never work with Ember -the best option was to silence her permanently!

On the other hand, Ember appeared disgruntled, but Zachary put a hand on her arm before she could, and even spoke on Debbie's behalf. "Ember, everyone including Debbie is hurting after what happened to James. She can come off as cold, but that comes with working with Isaac-it's not as if she doesn't care, but she's just that good at hiding her feelings."

Ember appeared a little jealous that Zachary knew Debbie so well. "You seem to know everything about her... But I still think that she's up to no good."

Debbie was within earshot and her eyes darkened.

Screw that woman!

Then, remembering the mysterious person who texted her, she whipped out her phone to text them.

[Do you have a way to eliminate Ember Lindt?]

Two minutes later, she received a document file and Debbie frowned as she tapped on it.

It turned out to be a detailed dossier of everything about Ember, even her family.

Debbie studied it and texted the mysterious person soon after, asking tentatively: [Do you have a grudge against her?]

Why would they investigate Ember so thoroughly otherwise?

Debbie wondered then if the person was trying to eliminate Ember while using herself-but who could they be?

An enemy of Ember's?

[Ember cares most about Zachary Slate. You can start with him.]

The mysterious person appeared uninterested in the question.

Debbie was left staring at the screen for a while-the mysterious person was clearly being evasive.

Still, she soon came up with an idea and sent a reply.

[Thanks for the tip.]

There was no reply, so Debbie pocketed her phone and strode off.

Over at Minerva, Irene was being interrogated repeatedly.

"Who did you give the research data to?"

The intimidating man who asked the question was leveling a sharp blue gaze at her, and it appeared that he would not give up as long as she did not talk.

After all this was serious-it concerned the rivalry between nations, and if she admitted to it, Zidonia's international reputation would be tarnished further and she would be charged as a Spy.

Minerva might even build a case around her at that point.

"I took it myself. No one told me to do it-I wanted to use it for personal reasons, but I lost it by accident."

"And it somehow ended up in the hands of Zidonia's top research center. Admit it-you're a Zidnoian spy. Do so, and we will release you."

Irene did not take the bait. "I'm not. I've told you many times-no one talked me into this. I was going to use it for personal profit, but I just lost it."

They were clearly displeased by Irene's obstinance. "Do you think being stubborn means a thing now? Or were you hoping someone would save you?"

"No, I know that no one is coming for me. I'll take responsibility for my actions, and I understand that I've ruined Mead Clinic's research efforts. I'm willing to take responsibility for any punishment, but I do not admit to spying or being incited."

Irene did not fear or cower despite the interrogation, because she knew that they would charge her with every crime they could think of if she showed weakness. She certainly learned her lesson, too-Stephen Carr was trustworthy, but the people around him had no vision.

### **Chapter 537**

There were those who willfully made the wrong choices for short term profits.

Irene certainly learned her lesson this time.

"Do you know what's going to happen if you insist on being so stubborn?" Her interrogator glared at her. "You're pregnant. Shouldn't you think of your child, even if you don't care about yourself?"

Irene's fingers clenched. "I told you-I admit to damaging the research effort, and I'll take my punishment accordingly."

After all, the hospital could only fire her and demand compensation, but it seems that the Minervan government wanted to make her crime a bigger issue than it was.

She knew all too well that if she confessed, they would use her to cause an international conflict. Her interrogators suddenly stopped to whisper to each other.

Irene could not hear what they were saying, but it definitely was nothing good given the looks on their faces.

And her hunch proved right soon enough.

It seemed that they could not get what they wanted from Irene, and therefore needed to make her yield in another way-by getting into her head.

She had been locked up in a precinct because Mead Clinic had already filed a lawsuit against her, but her interrogators lost patience since it has been five interrogations now and they needed something more drastic!

"Where are you taking me?" Irene asked, noticing that they were not returning to her usual cell.

They did not answer and instead snapped, "Shut up."

A little afraid now, Irene gingerly held her own belly, worried that her child would be hurt.

The more they walked, the darker and quieter the walkway seemed to be.

Clang.

A steel door opened and Irene stiffened.

Before she could get a good look, she was pushed into a cell.

This one was tiny and so dark she could not even see her own hands.

She then heard footsteps of her escort leaving.

Not knowing where she was, she slowly sat down on the cold floor.

Everything felt chilly—the air, her surroundings, her heart.

She could not help shuddering even as she held herself firmly. She then remembered Isaac, and wondered if he was worried that she went missing again.

Was he looking for her?

She feared that she would never see him again and felt so vulnerable for once that she could cry.

"Isaac..."

In this place that was so dark no one could discern her feelings and yet inspired fear anyway, she hoped so much that she would suddenly wake up from this nightmare, and that she would suddenly be home again, with Tommy, Sheryl, and Isaac beside her.

But it was just the beginning...

### **Chapter 538**

This time, Irene was denied food and water from her cell, and she could occasionally hear a baby's tormented cries. She curled into herself, clutching her belly whenever she heard it, fearful that the same would happen to her own child.

She had no idea how long she was kept in that dark cell, which seemed to transcend beyond space and light.

At first, she knocked on her door to get a response, but her answer was silence.

Eventually deciding that it was pointless, she simply gave up and idled to save her strength.

As more time passed, thirst and hunger seized her, and she yearned to see the light again.

"Who can save me?"

As she curled into herself at a corner of the wall, her thoughts soon became a mess and she started hallucinating. She started to tremble whenever she heard the baby's cries now.

Over at Duran, Isaac met Auric at a 7-star hotel.

The venue was grand beyond description, and the furnishings within were just as extravagant. Crystals, velour, red velvet, and gold were everywhere, and the very air seemed to smell of money and the local anesthetic.

Anyone who did not know better would believe that they had just stepped inside a palace, though the outward architecture was as modern as they come.

Auric Wes, the owner of the world-renowned hotel, was indisputably one of the world's richest men. Dressed in a white shirt, the facial hair on his visage only served to accentuate the distinct features on his visage.

He sat nonchalantly on a red couch weaved from genuine leather, and there was an open bottle of wine sitting on the table before him.

It was worth well over a hundred grand, but it appeared to be nothing to him.

Taking a deep puff of his cigar, white smoke swirled around his face as he said, 'I don't understand. Why are you pulling out?'

Our partnership is going to be-'

'I know,' Isaac replied.

Though he lacked Auric's riches, he did not appear to be at a disadvantage -one could even tell that he appeared superior and more composed.

After all, Auric's accomplishments came from his inheritance, while Isaac earned everything himself.

Men weathered by hardship were certainly more compelling, and Isaac already made up his mind before he came.

"Here are the papers concerned," Isaac said.

Auric waved to gesture for the pretty attendant nearby to pour a drink while he straightened himself in his seat and studied Isaac. "This begs the question-why?"

'Minerva's oil supply has been cut because of a war between two other countries. Even if they don't lack it at the moment and they've even exported it, there would soon be a supply shortage and the prices would shoot sky high. The two oil fields that you own is going to look very appealing-'

'Everyone knows that the early bird gets the early worm, but what I want to know is what could be better than our partnership if you're willing to give it up.'

Isaac and Auric were close, and they had been partners before-even old friends.

As such, Isaac did not lie. 'There's someone I want to get out of Minerva.'

His gaze darkened even as he spoke, while Auric reached for his glass and took a sip. "Who is worth that great a sacrifice?"

"A fellow Zidonian," Isaac replied.

He did not tell Auric about Irene to avoid unnecessary troubles.

### **Chapter 539**

Auric disagreed with Isaac's idea. "Minervan leaders have been trying to halt Zidonian's progress, and they'll make a huge fuss if they get any dirt. I really don't think you should go so far if it's not anyone important--"

'They're important to me, Auric.'

Isaac knew that he must sweeten the pot enough for the Minervans to release Irene and being the ail barons of Minerva, the Raideens would definitely take the deal. He was convinced that the Raideens would talk to the right people despite their personal agenda.

"You could talk to the ambassador--"

"That's too slow for me." Isaac had not the slightest hope for the Minervan embassy because it meant going through the bureaucracy. He could not wait while Irene was pregnant--not with all the procedures and intrigue potentially involved!

This was his only option, given the Minervans' cunning nature.

Naturally, he would lose money because it was such a roundabout solution, but that loss mattered not in comparison to Irene.

Auric thought it a waste, and while he was fine working with anyone since it meant more money, he disliked Minervans.

'Hey, I have some beauties ready, and it's rare you come by. We could have a good time at my private mansion this evening to unwind--'

"No, thanks." Isaac refused right away.

Auric chuckled. "It's the same thing all the time. Are you sure you're fine below the waist?"

Isaac got to his feet and sighed. "Not really. It's just that the missus is scary."

"...What?" Auric gasped. "When did you get married? I never knew--or were you hiding it from me?"

As far as he was aware, Isaac had been single. When did he get a wife?

What was she even like?

"I'll introduce you next time," Isaac said briskly--he had no time to waste at the moment.

Auric rarely found him rushing, and signed the papers he passed him: a transfer of partnership interest.

Stephen had arrived at Minerva too, since he found out from Mick Gooding that Irene's case was a difficult one, and he was the reason everything had happened in the first place.

"How did you manage such a horrific leak?" Mick growled as he stared at Stephen. "Hotmesh could have just kept the research data hidden while building their research based on it. Why publicize it and throw Irene in such a hot mess? Neither Isaac nor I got to see her face so far, you know."

Stephen was profoundly apologetic. "It's all my fault. I entrusted the task to someone unreliable which led to this entire mess. I mean, how could I have known that he would go public without telling anyone just for his personal gain? To be fair, he paid the price with his career."

"What good is that?" Mick growled, his annoyance rising. "We don't even know where they're keeping Irene. This is so worrying."

'And you think I'm not? Like I said, I know it's my mistake and I even came all the way here!" Stephen countered.

"But you're no help," Mick said. "You should just go home, the way I see it."

Stephen scowled right then-what was that supposed to mean?

"Yes, I made a mistake, but are you saying that I don't have a right to earn my forgiveness too?"

"No, but I'm afraid that Isaac would get annoyed when he sees you," Mick explained. "He's coming right now, so I should guess that he has a plan..."

"I'll leave once I see that Irene is fine." Stephen said. "And I'll help however I can."

"Fine, I won't talk you out of it," Mick told him. 'Make yourself at home."

"Now, now-I'm here on serious business, not a pleasure trip." Stephen then paused as he searched his memory. "Isaac must be shorthanded, too-his right-hand man... What's his name? James, I think. He got caught in an accident and ended up a vegetable. Honestly, he's still so young, it's so tragic..."

"What?!" A loud voice resounded right then, and Stephen turned to find the person standing at the doorway!

## **Chapter 540**

Erin Gooding strode into the room. "Did you just say James Cross? He's a vegetable?"

Erin was Mick's adopted daughter, and Stephen naturally knew her.

However, he had no idea what got her so agitated...

"You know James?" he asked.

Mick was watching Erin too-was there something between her and James that he did not know?

Erin hastily explained, "I met him when I was trying to ask Isaac Jefferson where my mother was buried."

"Oh, I see." Stephen thought nothing of it.

On the other hand, Mick knew his daughter-if she and James were mere acquaintances, she would not get so agitated after learning that James fell into a vegetative state.

Breathing a sigh, he thought to himself that his child was an adult now, and it was time she left the nest.

'You should go visit him.'

Erin was actually surprised by Mick's words. "Dad...?"

"Go!" Mick waved her off. "Just don't forget your way home."

Erin bit her lip. "Thanks, Dad."

With that, she ran into her room to pack her bags.

Stephen was actually perplexed. "What mischief are you up to this time?"

'You can tell? She and James Cross...' Mick gave him a look that said 'you-know-how-it-is'.

Stephen realized with a start. "You mean they're dating?"

"Shush. Keep it to yourself," Mick told him.

It was not as if Stephen was being a blabbermouth-the sudden tidbit was simply shocking.

Mick then checked his watch and got to his feet. "Time to go."

"Go? Go where?" Stephen asked, but he was already following Mick.

"Isaac's flight will arrive at six. Let's go get him\*" Mick told him.

Stephen glanced sideways at Mick just then. "I thought Isaac and you could not exist within the same room."

"Beats me." Mick was as surprised as him. "I don't know why he's treating me differently now too."

Stephen thought about it. "Maybe because he checked out Irene's belongings back at Melville Hospital."

Mick was emotional. "If I'm being honest, I'm grateful that he can forgive me."

Back then, he was driven by his selfishness to secrete Yvaine away, denying Isaac a mother as a child.

There was no doubt that it was cruel for a child, but Isaac was able to forgive Mick-not because he found out that Yvaine fell for Mick, but because Mick did save her and kept her alive for years.

Yvaine was always too gentle for her own good, and she would just keep getting hurt if she stayed at a place like Jefferson Manor.

That was why Isaac was able to let go.

Mick had just reached the airport when Isaac disembarked, so he and Stephen quickly went to him.

"You must be tired," Mick said in concern.

Isaac nodded slightly and glanced at Stephen. Still, he said nothing about his presence and simply strode outside.



Both Stephen and Mick were used to it, and they simply left with him without taking offense.

Although they were here to receive Isaac, it seems that Isaac had more appointments, and he gave his chauffeur an address instead of heading back to his hotel to rest.

They soon arrived at a mansion, and he alighted while telling everyone flatly, "I'm fine on my own."

With that, he strode toward the mansion.

For some reason, the mansion looked unremarkable, even mundane.

Stephen asked Mick, "Is he meeting someone?"

Mick replied. "Maybe, and I think we should go. He's not telling US because he doesn't need our help, and I certainly don't want to mess up his plans.

Stephen nodded in agreement.

At times like these, actions were far better than words.

Moreover, the pressure had always been on Isaac.

Ding dong.

Meanwhile, Isaac pressed on the doorbell outside, and the door soon opened!