

Runaway 801

Chapter 801

Irene was hesitant to enter the diner, but Isaac called out from behind just as she was about to turn and leave.

“Why aren’t you going in?”

Turning and seeing him, she asked, “What’s Zachary doing here?”

“He’s buying us lunch, so it’s natural that he’s there,” Isaac replied, gathering him in his arms. “It’s almost one. Aren’t you hungry?”

“I don’t want to see him,” Irene said.

What?

“Weren’t you good friends?” Isaac said, actually feeling a little weird as he spoke.

The fact that she and Zachary Slate had met each other before he met her always nagged at him.

It was not jealousy since things were clean between them and lacked any attraction, but he was uncomfortable regardless.

He could not explain what was wrong either!

Irene rolled her eyes at him just then. “I heard from Lulu. She says she’s getting married, and I wouldn’t know how to respond if Zachary asked.”

Isaac said coolly and nonchalantly, “Just pretend you aren’t aware.”

Irene sighed. “Yeah. Guess that’s the only way.”

She entered with Isaac then and Zachary rose to his feet, smiling. “You’re late.”

“I was held up,” Irene explained—she thought Isaac was treating her to something nice when she got his call, only to find out that it was Zachary buying.

“I’ve ordered, if you don’t mind,” he said. “I more or less know your tastes.”

They both sat down together opposite Zachary then.

“Why would you suddenly ask us out for lunch?” Irene asked, having the feeling that he found out about something and was trying to get her to talk.

“I’ve been busy lately, but I happened to be free today and called Isaac since it’s been a while,” Zachary said, keeping his eyes fixed on Irene. “Why do I feel like you’re being distant?”

“You’re ridiculous.” Irene denied it vehemently.

Zachary flashed a rare smile. “I’m just kidding.”

“Have you been busy lately?” Irene asked.

“Yeah,” Zachary nodded.

A waiter started bringing in their food just then and Irene picked up her fork and knife, saying, “Let’s eat—I’m hungry.”

Zachary smiled as he asked Isaac, “She looks hungry. Haven’t you been feeding her?”

Isaac shot him a look. “Why do I get the feeling that you’re mocking the way she eats?”

Zachary chuckled. “Well, she does lack manners when she’s wolfing her food like that... but as long as you like it.”

Irene was speechless.

She was just eating, but she somehow ended up a subject of ridicule?

Could a girl not eat in peace?

When she was finished, she rose to her feet and said, “Take your time and eat slowly. Don’t choke.”

“You’re really getting a temper after being with Isaac for so long,” Zachary said. “You used to be milder... Or is temper infectious?”

Irene smiled at him. “Can’t help it. He’s really rubbing off on me, so try not to mess with me from now on.”

Picking up her bag, she told Isaac, “I still have work in the afternoon, so I have to go.”

Isaac got to his feet. "I'll drive you back."

"It's alright—Eagle is waiting for me outside. It'd be a long detour when you return to your office, and a waste of time."

"Yeah," Isaac replied and told her, "Come home early."

"Okay," she said, waving him goodbye.

After Irene left, Zachary's expression turned serious. "Actually, there's a reason I asked you out here..."

Chapter 802

Isaac leveled a cool look at Zachary that pretty much said 'I knew it'.

"Shoot!"

Zachary sighed again. "I wanted to ask Irene about Lulu, but she seemed wary about me so I didn't ask. Does she know something?"

"You're imagining things." Isaac told him off immediately. "Weren't you just putting your whole heart into your work lately? That's good, so keep that up."

Zachary was speechless, wondering if Isaac could not understand him because he was leading a blissful life with Irene, so anyone else's business was not his.

"Fine," Zachary said as he reclined against his chair.

Isaac then put down his fork and knife. "Try to be nice if you meet a nice girl. It's not like there's only one woman in this world."

"Really?" Zachary was not about to forget how Isaac brooded because of Irene in the past.

Isaac stared at Zachary for several heartbeats before snorting. "I'm doing this for your own good. Don't talk about my past if you know what's good for you."

Zachary chuckled. "I got you good, huh?"

Isaac ignored him and strode off then.

Still, he paused at the doorway, and since he wanted Zachary to give up instead of obsessing over finding Lulu, he said, "I heard Irene saying that Lulu chose to start over. Give up already."

With that, he started to head outside, but stopped in his tracks again when Zachary caught up.

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"Sleep on it," Isaac replied flatly, and then warned, "And don't be so casual with Irene."

Zachary was speechless, but since Isaac might get a little upset if he did not play along easily, he decided to mess with him.

Surely he could not let Isaac off so easily!

"We've always been like this for a while. It's not going to be that easy to change a habit. I'll try to change, but it might take some time"

With those words, Zachary left Isaac behind as he strode off with a huge strut in his gait.

While Isaac was left speechless and staring at Zachary's back, he wanted nothing less than to kick him so hard he'd fall flat on his face, with his rump in the air!

...

As soon as Irene returned to Hotmesh Research, Finn informed her that someone was asking to see her.

"Who is it?"

"I don't know. I asked him to wait for you in the conference room."

Irene started to head there while giving him some instructions on his work, and Finn soon left, while Irene entered the conference alone.

Opening the door and seeing that it was Mark Wickers, she entered and asked, "You're here already?"

"Of course. I've done what you asked," Mark smiled.

Irene was certainly surprised. "That's quick."

“Well, New Sun Pharma is in the same business and a rival, so getting dirt on them is really easy.”

Irene sat down and held out her hand. “Where is it?”

Mark did not give it to her right away, but instead asked her what she wanted it for.

“Why would you want to upset New Sun Pharma out of the blue?”

Irene did not hide it from him or treat him like a stranger. “I had no choice—I got the photos, but I’m still worried that they would resort to other dirty moves and harass Professor Lowe.”

“Let me help you with this,” Mark offered.

Though Irene was grateful, she did not want to trouble him further. “Getting dirt on them is already too much trouble. I can’t let you get dragged into this because of me.”

However, Mark had clearly made up his mind and was brimming with confidence. “Oh, they’re my rivals and they tried to backstab me before. They’d know it’s me if their dirty laundry was exposed, but they won’t do much since it’s just payback from me. On the other hand, if they realize that it was you, and that you’re trying to poach Professor Lowe from them, they’d come for you like a pack of wild dogs—it’s really better to just leave this to me.”

“Thank you,” Irene said.

“Oh, it’s fine. I know you work for the sake of advancing our medical field and contributing, and we can all imagine what it’s like if New Sun Pharma gets their hands on it instead. That’s why I’m not just helping you—please don’t feel burdened.”

With that, Mark rose to his feet. “I shall head back to prepare now.”

Irene said, “They’re still bugging Professor Lowe to sign an agreement...”

“It’s fine to show your hand. Leave the rest to me,” Mark said confidently.

Chapter 803

Mark got up and left the conference room, and Irene walked with him to the front entrance.

She cheered up considerably after her conversation with Mark, and she then told Professor Lowe to contact New Sun Pharma, so that they could talk about the agreement New Sun Pharma wanted to

sign with him.

“I thought we should wait?” Professor Lowe asked—why the sudden change of plans?

Irene said, “Someone will help us resolve the issue, so it went smoother than planned.”

“Oh... I shall go to them, then? Will you be coming too?” Professor Lowe asked.

“Actually, I’ll pass,” she replied—if she went, it would be no different from telling New Sun Pharma that she had a hand in this.

Still, worried that Professor Lowe would get hurt if he went alone, she said, “My bodyguard will be going with you. He’ll keep you safe.”

“Alright, thank you very much.” Professor Lowe replied.

With that, Irene sent Eagle to escort Professor Lowe to New Sun Pharma, while she waited back at Hotmesh Research.

...

Eagle returned with Professor Lowe at seven, and Irene asked, “How did it go?”

“It went smoothly...” Professor Lowe replied. “Though I must admit I was scared for a moment.”

“What?”

“Oh, you have no idea,” Professor Lowe said as he sat down. “The instant they heard that I was rejecting them and not to sign their agreement, their expressions darkened and they were all at my throat. I just gave it to them straight like you said, and told them I didn’t fear them. They asked if I’d stolen the photos, so I said I did, and that they were the ones who messed with me first and I was just maintaining my personal rights. They tried to get physical right then, but they didn’t reach me thanks to Eagle... that was when their boss got a call that they had internal issues and someone ratted them out, with the police getting involved. That meant they didn’t have time for me, so they allowed me to leave without issue... But honestly, that was close.”

Irene smiled. “As long as you’re safe.”

“Were you the one who sent the police on them?” Professor Lowe asked.

Irene did not tell him the truth. “It might be someone they offended before.”

Professor Lowe nodded, not appearing skeptical at all. “True. They’re so despicable they would definitely have made other enemies.”

Breathing a sigh of relief then, he exclaimed, “Let’s sign the agreement then!”

“Sure,” Irene said, and she had Finn Crowe bring the agreement they drafted before.

Professor Lowe signed it without even reading, having grown to trust Irene after what happened.

“I’ll come here tomorrow to start work.”

Irene shook his hand. “Thanks for joining us.”

Professor Lowe nodded. “I certainly look forward to our success.”

Irene said, “I’m sure it’s just a matter of time after you join us.”

“I’ll do my best. I won’t let you down—not after the lengths you went for me!” Professor Lowe declared earnestly.

Their research would develop quickly with Professor Lowe’s skills, and while things got busy for Irene, she did not feel all tired, and everyone was motivated just like her.

...

James Cross arrived at Isaac’s office with a stack of documents, appearing hesitant to speak.

Isaac did not notice the look on his face and simply gestured for him to put it down. “You can go back to work now.”

James, however, stayed and asked tentatively, “Do you have a moment, sir?”

Isaac looked up. “You have something to ask?”

James nodded. “I need your permission.”

Isaac put aside the document he was holding and reclined against his chair. “Shoot.”

“Please take a look at this.” James said, and passed him a document.

Isaac was puzzled, since James was always candid at work.

What had gotten into him today?

Chapter 804

James was certainly not acting normal, and Isaac flipped through the document he passed him while feeling puzzled.

It was a company dossier and he did not notice anything out of place.

“Can we build a partnership with them?” James asked just then.

Isaac frowned in confusion at James at that—it was a Minervan company, a manufacturer of cosmetic products.

What reason would they have to work with them? They were not involved in that field, and even if they intended expansion, it would definitely not be in this field.

James quickly explained, “I heard that Erin is working there. If we’re partners with that company, I have a reason to meet her.”

Isaac was speechless. Going through all that just to meet Erin Gooding?

“What if she resigns when she sees you?”

While James was left speechless, Isaac pressed on. “And if she gets a job in F&B after that, does that mean we have to expand into that business as well?”

James could not say anything to that.

Isaac got up and walked to his side, clapping him on the shoulder, and said, “Just go to her if you want to see her. There’s no need to make things complicated—just be direct.”

James would certainly like that, but he was just worried that Erin would refuse to see him.

Despite his disappointment, Isaac told him, “Are you really giving up even before you try?”

James thought about it and he had to agree.

Even if he did not want to meet Erin directly, he could just take a peek and make sure that she was

fine. He would certainly be relieved that way, instead of having to worry all the time.

With that, he whipped out his phone and booked a plane ticket!

Once that was done, James asked, “Did Irene agree to my suggestion last time?”

Isaac returned to his seat. “I haven’t discussed it with her.”

Irene had been so busy lately she would always come home late, and he had yet to discuss it with her.

On the other hand, James actually thinks that Isaac would not hesitate if he believed that the plan was viable—dragging his feet was not his style.

“Do you have misgivings about the plan?”

Isaac tapped his fingers on his desk as he said, “It probably isn’t as simple as we’d think. You’re saying that we could draw out the mastermind if we isolate Irene, but they did not leave any traces even after sending that gang after her. It’s clear that they were very prudent, and it’d be an obvious trap if we suddenly isolate Irene. They won’t fall for it that easily.”

James had to agree. “But shouldn’t we do something, at least?”

Isaac actually had someone he suspected, but did not want to startle his quarry since he did not have any evidence. “There’s no rush.”

Harvey Gooding was not a concern, and with Stan Hill keeping an eye on him, he would never dare to get out of line, nor would he have the time or strength.

As for a person who knew him and wanted to hurt him through Irene? It was not difficult to guess.

“Okay.” James had faith in Isaac’s judgment, and that he must have a plan if he was this calm.

He had no reason to worry as he traveled to Minerva now.

...

It was past 10 PM when Finn walked up to Irene, asking, “Do you want supper?”

Their research was now at the practical phase, and they were testing it on animals.

Irene was operating, having scrubbed up, and was holding a scalpel in hand. Putting it away, he proceeded to the stitching.

“What time is it?” she asked without looking up.

“Almost eleven,” Finn replied.

“I’ll pass. I will be heading home soon anyway.”

Someone must stay back to observe the vitals of the condition of the animal with the heart transplant.

Once the stitching was done, exhaustion started to hit her. “You can clean up the rest. I’ll be here early tomorrow.”

“Okay. You have nothing to worry about—just leave it to me,” Finn said.

Irene took off her scrubs and had a drink.

She had been standing beside the surgical table for three hours and her limbs were sore.

After a short break, she left Hotmesh Research, with Eagle driving her home.

When she returned home and saw that Isaac had not returned, she actually heaved a sigh of relief—she was worried that he would complain about her coming home late.

She took a bath and quickly went to bed, falling asleep quickly since she was tired.

Still, she vaguely felt something pressing on her and she had trouble breathing!

“Ugh...”

Chapter 805

Irene tried to push the crushing weight on top of her, but she could not make it budge at all.

She opened her eyes and immediately picked up the faint scent of alcohol hitting her nose.

Frowning, she asked meekly, “Were you drinking?”

“Just a little,” he answered vaguely, nestling his head against her collarbone.

“You’re heavy...” she murmured as she pushed at him again.

Isaac kissed her neck and started to undress her, without forgetting to answer, "Nope."

His breathing was soon short and rushed, and Irene forgot herself amid the sounds of his breathing.

There was no telling they had been at it, but she was left so tired she did not want to move, while all her limbs were sore.

However, Isaac remained vigorous and persisted.

"I still have work tomorrow... Umph..."

He kissed her before she could finish, cutting her off mid-sentence.

It was after a long while that she was finally willing to release her, and she lay limply under the blanket, rasping, "Get me my pills."

Isaac opened the drawer, but saw that the pill bottle inside was empty.

He poured her a glass of water and said, "You finished the pills."

Irene remembered then that she took the last one a while ago.

Isaac straightened her disheveled hair just then and asked, "Won't there be side effects if you take too many?"

"It's fine. There aren't many side effects," she closed her eyes. "I'll get another box next time."

With that, she returned to sleep.

Isaac was going to ask if there were other methods or he could take some medication instead, but he did not wake her since she looked very tired.

Pulling the blanket over her, he went to take a shower.

...

Unsurprisingly, Irene woke up late the next morning.

It was nine when she opened her eyes, and Isaac had already left when she hurried downstairs.

Everyone already had breakfast, and Tommy was playing in the living room.

Seeing her arrive, Mrs. Watson asked, "Would you like to eat now, Mrs. Jefferson? I've been keeping your portion heated for you."

Irene waved her off. "No, thanks."

Nonetheless, Sheryl stopped her. "Eat—even if you're busy. Whatever it is, it can wait."

While Irene paused awkwardly, Mrs. Watson chimed in, "That's right. Your health is very important—you should listen to your mother."

Seeing both elders were so concerned for her, Irene hence turned around and headed to the dining room to eat.

While Mrs. Watson brought her foot, she called Finn and started to stuff food into her mouth.

Sheryl came over and snatched the phone out of her hands, hanging up the call. "Eat properly."

Irene was left silent, but not daring to retort, she simply kept her head down and ate.

Mrs. Watson stood nearby and smiled. "Mr. Jefferson would not dare to discipline you, so it's good your mother is around or you'd really be unruly."

Irene looked up at Mrs. Watson as she chewed. "You're with them too, huh?"

"We just want what's best for you," Mrs. Watson said.

"That's right," Sheryl echoed.

Irene hung her head—fine, she lost this one.

Sheryl only allowed her out of the door after she tamely finished her food, and threw her phone at her when she asked for it.

"I'll be home early today," she said.

Sheryl snorted. "Do whatever you like."

Irene was certainly aware that she was late because of work, but Sheryl was more concerned about her health than her work.

Once out of the house, she got in her car and called Isaac while Eagle drove.

Soon, he answered with his usual deep voice, “You’re up?”

“Why didn’t you wake me?” Irene asked a little grumpily.

Isaac sounded amused. “It’s your own fault for sleeping so soundly.”

“That’s because you—”

Realizing then that she was still in front of Eagle, she stopped herself in time!

Hearing a quiet chuckle from the other end, Irene’s nails dug into her lap. “You better come home early tonight.”

“Why?” Isaac asked.

“Payback.”

With that, she hung up.

Isaac stared at his phone screen after she did, raising his brow and grinning broadly!

...

James arrived at Minerva, resting for the night at a hotel since he arrived late.

He was going to see Erin in the morning, and was not tired despite the long flight. In fact, he was spirited, perhaps because he would get to see Erin soon.

He followed Isaac’s advice to meet her directly instead of sneaking around, and hence waited for her at her workplace.

Erin was going to work when she saw James standing outside her office building, and she did not hesitate to turn and leave.

However, James saw her and promptly gave chase!

Chapter 806

James called out to Erin. "Hey."

It would have been better if he did not, as she quickened her pace when he did.

James quickly ran after her and caught her wrist. "Why are you running?"

His tone was relaxed and did not convey his frustration.

However, Erin did not feel the same.

She did not like James's touch because she considered herself filthy.

"Let me go!" she snapped, dead serious.

James refused. "I came all the way to see you. You'd hurt me if you still hid from me,"

He kept his tone as mild as possible so that Erin could let go of the past. "How about a movie tonight, seeing that I'm being sincere?"

Unmoved, Erin snapped coolly, "Let me go!"

James did not and kept smiling. "Whatever you say."

Unable to shake him off, Erin was almost hysterical, and leaned down to bite his hand so that he would let go.

He did not, even though she could taste blood.

In fact, he was looking at her determinedly. "That brings me back."

Erin then remembered her scuffle with James soon after they met, and it felt like ages ago!

However, she was much more rational these days, and certainly not as mean.

Looking into James's eyes, she said, "I'm not who I was..."

"You've never changed in my heart, and that will never change." James smiled, and started to gather into her arms.

Erin turned pale right then. "Don't touch me!"

She was so hysterical that James felt jolted, and he released her in reflex.

Her emotional outburst drew many stares, and unable to calm down, she started to run again.

James quickly gave chase when he came to his senses, but kept his distance this time without closing in recklessly.

He was relieved to see her run back to home.

...

As Erin ran back to her room, Mick Gooding saw her abrupt return and asked, "What's wrong?"

She was supposed to be at work, and it was not a public holiday...

Worried, he knocked on Erin's door and asked, "What's wrong, Erin?"

Erin wiped her tears as she replied, "I'm fine, Dad."

She was at once guilty and miserable that she snapped at James, but when he tried to hug her, she remembered the time when that gang raped her.

She did not mean it, but her emotions burst out right then. She could not face James, let alone stay with him and act like nothing ever happened.

She spoke from behind the door. "I need your help, Dad..."

"Tell me." Mick spoke from outside.

"James is here. Tell him that I won't ever marry him, and that he shouldn't look for me after we break up."

Mick did a double take.

So James was here... That was why she was so agitated.

"Alright, I get it. Just calm down, okay?"

Mick did not try to dissuade her since she could not calm down long enough to think, and anything he said would be pointless... or even make her feel worse!

Mick turned and headed downstairs, stepping out of the house, and he saw James standing by the

road.

James appeared helpless, so Mick went over to him.

“James.”

James turned, and straightened his slump when he saw Mick.

He was a man and should not show weakness no matter how bad things were.

“I came to see Erin.”

Mick said, “Shall we get a coffee?”

James nodded.

After they took their seats, Mick spoke first. “Erin needs time.”

He had more to say, but he stopped as he looked at James.

Chapter 807

James had an idea of what Mick wanted to say, and so, he spoke first. “I’m convinced that time mends, and that Erin would eventually forget the trauma in the days to come. I don’t believe that she’d be hurting forever, and I want to stay with her in the long run. You have nothing to worry about—you can entrust her to me, and I promise to make her happy for the rest of her life.”

Mick was going to ask James just that, and hence, he switched gears. “She still needs time to calm down. Give her some space.”

“I just wanted to see her,” James said, nodding. “I didn’t expect her to react that badly.”

“She’s calm around us, but she can’t do it around you,” Mick explained. “That means she cares about you—what you think and how you’d feel. That’s why she would lose control, so please understand her.”

“I know.” James certainly understood and therefore did not take offense.

Mick then asked, “Where are you staying? I have another house, you could—”

“At Swiz Hotel,” James replied. “I took leave but I’m still on the job and might leave anytime. You

needn't bother—a hotel is just fine.”

Mick nodded. “Just contact me if there’s anything you need.”

“I will,” James replied, and he then told Mick to leave sooner since he was worried about leaving Erin alone at home.

Mick could feel that James was serious about Erin, and was therefore glad, even treating him as family.

“Don’t worry,” Mick said. “I’ll take good care of her. Just call me if you want to find out how she’s doing.”

...

Mick found Erin sitting in the living room after he returned home, and he headed over with a smile. “Feeling better?”

Erin had calmed down and was not agitated like before.

She flashed a chagrined smile. “I just called the office to take the day off.”

Mick got her a glass of water and sat beside her, asking softly, “Do you feel better now?”

Erin nodded, hesitating for a moment before asking, “Is he alright?”

Mick did not actually realize to whom she was referring too. “Who?”

Erin thought that Mick was doing it on purpose and she bit her lip, pouting. “Why are you messing with me, Dad?”

“But I really don’t know what you’re talking about, darling.” Mick threw up his hands defensively.

Since Erin could not tell him that she bit James, she decided to drop it, leaving Mick speechless as she rose to her feet.

She was the one who did not explain herself, and she was upset at him?

Catching up to her, she asked, “What did you want to ask? About James? What happened to him?”

“It’s fine, Dad,” she said with a smile. “I was just asking.”

Mick nodded, but remained skeptical.

Still, Erin stopped on the stairs for a moment and turned to look at him. "Do you know where James is staying?"

"Swiz Hotel," Mick quickly replied.

"Oh," Erin murmured, and headed upstairs.

Mick thought she was going to see James just then. Why did she return to her room instead?

Was she going to meet him or not?

He was so confused...

Sighing, he just hoped that she could get over it soon and face James directly.

Even so, it was Erin herself who would decide when, and no one's advice would mean a thing.

That was why Mick just had to protect her quietly.

After lunch, he was just emerging from his study when he saw Erin leaving the house.

He did not ask where she was going, but he had a hunch that she went looking for James.

...

In his room at Swiz Hotel, James was seated on the couch by the window.

His lunch was sitting on the table behind him, untouched.

He was spacing out and thinking, his hand resting nonchalantly on his lap.

Erin's bite left a clear mark, and a dark-red clot had built up where her teeth sank deep since he did not treat it.

Ding dong...

The doorbell suddenly rang, and James frowned from the abrupt disturbance, seemingly annoyed.

Still, he got up and answered the door!

Chapter 808

James's frown eased when he saw that it was Erin, and he soon appeared delighted beyond words. "You came? Missed me, didn't you? Can't bear to let my trip be wasted?"

Erin lowered her gaze and immediately saw her bite marks on his hand.

Still, the look of heartache lasted briefly in her eyes before she quickly hid it.

Her fingers gradually clenching on her handbag strap, she tried to make herself sound as calm as possible. "I want to talk."

James stood aside. "Come in first."

She did so, and then noticed the food left untouched on the table.

"You didn't have lunch?"

James smiled. "I'm not hungry. Would you like a drink? I'll get it for you."

Erin sat down. "I'm not thirsty. Just sit—we need to talk."

James was about to reach for a glass but paused.

He took a deep breath, having sensed that Erin was here to break up with him.

Calming down just then, he walked over and sat opposite her.

"I'm not breaking up with you."

Erin could not help frowning, having been stopped before she could say it.

James looked at her and smiled. "I'll give you time."

"Would you wait if I asked for ten years?" Erin deliberately asked for a long time so that he would give up.

James did not flinch, however, and he replied seriously, "I'll wait for the rest of my life."

"You're crazy," she blurted.

“Yeah, I’m crazy about you,” he said, relaxed as ever. “You did not cheat on me. I have no reason to separate from you.”

Erin’s fingers clenched, and she looked him in the eye. “I don’t like you.”

“You actually liked me?” James asked. “I thought you loved me all along.”

Erin was speechless—James was never like this before, since he was always serious.

She did not know how to respond as he suddenly gave up on his old routine.

James lowered his gaze then and continued quietly as he stared at her clenched fingers. “You never gave up on me when I was a vegetable, taking care of me even though I might not wake up. You must love me to bits if you could be that determined, and that’s why I’ll stick with you too. Do you get it?”

Erin feigned composure and snapped, “I was just being sympathetic! Love you? How did you get so thick-skinned, James Cross?”

Rising to her feet, she started to leave. “Since you don’t want to talk it out, that’s all I have to say!”

James did not move. “Erin.”

Erin stopped wheeled on him. “What?”

“What do you want to talk about?” he asked, studying her. “Would you really feel happy if you broke up with me?”

“At least I won’t feel pressured,” Erin replied honestly.

“Then, how about this: I’ll hook up with a couple girls tonight, get laid. Would that make you feel better?” James said, walking up to her.

Erin was quiet for a moment and bit her lip. “Do whatever you want. I don’t care.”

She started towards the door, but James caught her wrist. “That’s supposed to make us equal by your definition, no? What are you upset about? Because you don’t want me to mess with other women?”

“Nope.” Erin denied it.

“Lying is not a virtue,” James told her.

“You’re the liar here. I’m being serious,” she said, and tried to shake him off. “Let me go.”

James did not, and continued patiently, “Well, since you’re serious, I’ll get some girls here right now. Just sit over there and watch.”

Erin glared at him. “You sicko!”

Chapter 809

James looked into Erin’s eyes and smiled. “I like it that you’re upset.”

It means that she cared about him, and that she did not want to share his body with other women.

Erin lowered her head, her voice unwittingly turning raspy. “You’re so annoying.”

James tenderly reached out with his arms to hold her.

This time, she did not push him away, but she grabbed him by the collar instead as she forced back her tears.

She was failing, even as she sobbed. “Could you not? Please don’t make this difficult for me.”

Her shoulders were shaking and her tears started to roll, and she leaned against his chest. “I-I don’t deserve to be with you...”

James held her tightly then and kissed her hair and her cheek before whispering beside her ear, “You gave me your first time to me. I had you in your purest state.”

“No, I’ve been defiled...”

“Shush.”

James pressed a finger on her lips. “It’s in the past, and I’ve punished the people who hurt you. They’ll spend the rest of their lives in jail, and I’ve instructed their jailmates to make sure that they wish they were dead.”

“But...”

“Would you want to see me end up like them? Barely alive because of you?”

Erin looked up then, her eyes welling with tears over her skinny but pretty cheeks. “No, I don’t. I want you to be safe and happy...”

“I’ll only be happy with you. Do you understand?” James said as he gave her a gentle peck on the cheek. “Trust me just this once.”

He closed his eyes, his lips tenderly lowering to her eyes to kiss the tears off the corner of her eye. “Please don’t break my heart.”

Erin wrapped her arms tightly around his neck just then and put her face against his chest. “I love you... but what should I do? I’d rather be the only one hurting.”

James put his arms around her thin waist, “Trust me, the darkness will pass and a bright future awaits us in the end—it’s a spring day, filled with life.”

“Can I be without you without feeling any pressure?”

“Yeah,” James rasped. “I wouldn’t have come if I’d given up on you.”

Erin cried even harder then.

Because she tried to hold back her tears, it was even more bitter and she could not stop.

She felt lonely and despaired, but as she leaned against his arms right now, she found refuge.

What should she do? She loved him so much she wanted to be with him for the rest of her life!

As all the feelings she repressed burst out, she could no longer hold back and she cried audibly in his arms.

There was no telling how long that passed. Her feet turned numb and her eyes turned red and swollen, while her voice became hoarse.

“Does your hand still hurt?” she sniffled.

“Yeah,” James nodded, looking at her lovingly then. “It’d hurt more if you left me.”

Erin lifted his hand to see the bite marks on the back of his hand.

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s alright.” James reached out to wipe her tears. “I can’t stay long—I’ll be gone tomorrow. Stay with

me for today.”

“Okay,” Erin nodded. “You must be hungry since you haven’t had lunch, yes? Let’s eat outside.”

His lunch on the table had already turned cold.

“Okay,” James said. “We can catch a movie after that.”

“Okay.”

They went to a restaurant, and Erin was watching him eat since she already ate.

Still, James cut a slice of his steak and held it beside her mouth.

A little embarrassed, she said, “I had lunch.”

James simply stared at her in silence without answering, but he was obviously determined.

Erin struggled a little before leaning forward to eat the slice, but James’s hand withdrew just as she was about to reach it.

Missing her mark, she looked up to see James grinning in amusement.

She blushed right then!

“You’re nuts!”

Chapter 810

James kept grinning in amusement. “Just pulling your leg.”

Erin rose to her feet right then. “Enjoy your meal.”

James quickly caught her wrist. “You’re really upset, huh? Alright, it’s your turn to pull a prank on me.”

“When did you change so much?” Erin asked, staring at him—she almost could not recognize him.

He never behaved like this before! How did he change so drastically in such a short time?

“I just wanted to cheer you up,” James said, tugging at her so that she sat down. “Alright, I won’t tease

you anymore. Here—take this slice and mess with me.”

Erin smiled despite herself.

“No way, that’s so childish.”

James smiled as he watched her smiling face.

There were not many others at the cinema when they arrived after James had his lunch, and it was just the two in the entire hall.

Still, James put an arm around her shoulder and said, “Come on. Lean on my shoulder.”

Erin did so, like a delicate little bird.

She suddenly said softly, “You never did this before.”

“Did what?” James asked, lowering his gaze at her.

“This,” Erin said. “It’s the first time we’re catching a movie together. Before this, it was always work, work, work, and work—like you’re a dog.”

James was speechless, but he smiled since she felt relaxed, and decided that everything he did was worth it.

“Alright, I won’t work like a dog from now on. I’ll try to keep you company more often.”

Emotional, Erin pushed herself against his chest, swallowing the bitterness that came unwittingly with a smile. “Okay.”

The film they watched was a romantic comedy, with laughs and love.

Erin’s mood slowly improved with James’s company and she felt wistful as he prepared to leave the next day.

Still, she did not let it show.

“I’ll come by when I’m free,” James told her.

She smiled. “Okay.”

Even so, her eyes turned red as she watched his plane take flight.

...

At Hotmesh Research, Irene was reading records of the conditions of the animal that had been transplanted with the artificial heart they developed.

Everything was within the accepted parameters.

“We succeeded, haven’t we?” Finn Crowe asked.

Irene shook her head. “It’s just been two weeks. We need to wait at least half a month, and it’d only be a success if there’s no rejection after a month.”

“Well, at least things were hurried along with Professor Lowe joining our ranks,” Finn said.

Irene could not deny that—Professor Lowe was the one who eased them through the bottleneck they faced.

There was every sign that the effort they put in would pay off now.

“You all seemed pleased!” A familiar voice spoke just then.

Irene turned to find Dennis Turner standing there. She exclaimed in surprise, “Hello, Director Turner! What are you doing here?”

“I heard you had a successful breakthrough, so I came by for a look.” Dennis heaved a long sigh, clearly in a good mood. “I’m so pleased that I’m alive to see this.”

“You’ll live another hundred years,” Irene told him.

“I’d be too old. I won’t want to live that long,” Dennis chuckled heartily, his good mood simply apparent.

His joke lightened the mood, drawing laughter from everyone present.

“What are you reading?” Dennis was staring at the record book she was holding.

Irene could tell that he wanted to read it, so she simply handed it to him.

Dennis did not feel awkward even though she read his mind, and he smiled as he took it. “Well then, let me see.”

He nodded repeatedly, probably content with the records.

Bah!

The sheep which was transplanted with the artificial heart bleated just then.

“Come on, let’s take a look.” Dennis said.

Finn led the way, and Irene walked with him. “It’s all thanks to Professor Lower. Our progress wouldn’t have been that quick otherwise.”

“I heard about that,” Dennis said, clapping her on the shoulder. “You’ve dealt with it well.”

They arrived at the fence where the lamb was kept. Its abdomen was bandaged and attached to a square box apparatus.

The data on it was changing endlessly, but not by a wide margin.

As everything was within normal parameters, it proved that the test was going well.

But in his excitement, Dennis suddenly stiffened and dropped to the floor!