

From Ashes of Scandal to His Embrace (Laurinda)

Chapter 81

[664 words]

"But I guess I was lucky. I had a medical team with me the whole time. We fought for my life over and over for more than ten days. After a month of treatment, I finally made it past the worst of it. Even then, I had to spend another six months recovering before I even started to look normal again."

As Laurinda shared her story, Adolphus clenched the lighter in his hand. His chest ached for her. He couldn't even imagine how much she'd suffered.

"Did you ever find out what happened?" His voice was tight. There was no way he'd let the people who hurt Laurinda walk away.

"I asked," came the reply. "Laurinda said someone on her team betrayed her, but she doesn't know who. It all happened so fast. I looked into it too. It was some local faction from Mistfall Atoll, but I couldn't figure out which one."

"That's fine. If we can't find the exact person, we'll just deal with all of them. Sooner or later, the right one will get what's coming."

Adolphus grabbed his jacket and headed for the door. York watched him go, leaning against the desk with a lazy air. His eyes narrowed as he thought about Adolphus. He seemed like a solid guy.

When York got back to Laurinda's room, he was surprised to see so many people crowded inside. Finn and Harden were there too, which he hadn't expected.

York glanced over at Bonnie, who was sitting on a bench in the hallway. He pointed at the people in the room, silently mouthing, "Why are they here?"

"Finn came with Lacy," Bonnie whispered back. "Lacy said they ran into each other outside the hospital. Baily insisted on coming in. He said that even if Laurinda isn't officially part of the Austin family, she grew up with them..."

York raised his eyebrows, catching on, and shot a thoughtful look at Finn, trying to figure out what he was up to.

"That guy's got some serious schemes," York muttered. "After the way you treated him, I can't believe he just let it go."

Bonnie rolled her eyes. She remembered how Finn had looked like he wanted to tear her apart before. Now he was all calm and polite, as if nothing had happened. Honestly, it was kind of scary.

"Adolphus isn't here. Go find a doctor and clear everyone out. Lacy too. We don't owe him anything. The accident happened at his ranch. When Laurinda's better, we'll make sure he pays for it."

"Got it."

't waste any time. She

Bonnie didn't

brought a doctor over, who took one the

look at the crowded room and

frowned. A few sharp words later, everyone but Baily had filed out Baily sat there stubbornly, refusing to move.

He looked at Laurinda, who was still asleep, his face softening with something like real affection.

"Doctor, she's my granddaughter. I can't leave. I'll only feel better once I see her wake up myself."

The doctor glanced at Laurinda's chart and shook his head.

"She doesn't have any family listed. You're not her grandfather. Please don't disturb

her while she's resting. She needs peace and quiet."

When Baily kept sitting there, the doctor's patience wore thin.

"If you don't leave, I'll have to call security. I don't think you want to make a scene in the hospital, do you?"

Realizing the doctor meant it, Baily stood up, gave a cold snort, and walked out of the room. He sat on the bench in the hallway, clearly not planning to leave the hospital just yet

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Finn stayed by the door, looking at Laurinda for a long moment, a little disappointed he hadn't had the chance to introduce Harden to her.

He turned to Bonnie, his tone polite and even.

"Looks like Laurinda won't be waking up for a while. I'll come back another day to see her. Please let her know I wish her a speedy recovery."

Bonnie gave Finn a smile that was more forced than friendly, but before she could say anything, Finn had already walked away quickly making it obvious he didn't want to chat any longer.

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Chapter 82

[651 words]

Lacy opened his mouth to say something, but before he could get a word out, York slung an arm around his shoulders and steered him out the door.

Lacy didn't even try to shake him off. He knew he was partly to blame for what happened to Laurinda. If York wanted to give him a hard time, he would just have to deal with it.

As they passed by the emergency room, a wave of gut-wrenching screams echoed down the hall. Lacy stopped in his tracks.

"That sounded like Adah," he said quietly.

York frowned, trying to remember. The name rang a bell, but he couldn't quite place it. "Who's Adah?"

"She's the one who took the horse without permission and got Laurinda hurt."

"I was planning to work with the Charles family. When I first met Adah, she seemed alright. So when she asked to come to the ranch's opening, I didn't say no. I never expected she'd turn out to be such a reckless idiot..."

York suddenly remembered what Jasper had told him about the incident at the ranch. He let go of Lacy and headed straight for the emergency room, his stride quick and determined.

From a distance, he spotted two people lurking just outside the ER, peeking in like they were up to no good.

York walked up and grabbed Jasper by the collar with one hand, clapping his other hand over Jasper's mouth to keep him from making any noise.

"What are you two doing here?" he asked.

Irvin jumped, startled, but as soon as he saw Jasper wasn't scared and was actually grinning, he figured they probably knew each other. He tucked a little bottle back into his sleeve and pointed toward the emergency room so York could see for himself.

York let go of Jasper and looked where Irvin was pointing. His eyes widened in shock. The person inside looked... well, almost like a toad.

"Who is that? What happened?"

Jasper glanced at Adah's twisted face and couldn't hide the smug little smile on his lips. "No idea, but she had it coming. Karma, you know? She looks awful."

"If she looks that bad, maybe you shouldn't stare," York said, taking Jasper's hand and gently pulling him away. As they walked, he gave Jasper a soft warning.

"You're still just a kid. Sometimes you can get involved in things, but you shouldn't act on impulse.

Laurinda will Handle that woment

herself when she wakes up. For now, you should go home. Baily is upstairs, and it's best you stay downstairs."

Hearing Baily's name, Irvin remembered how Laura had been running all over the place for Adah earlier. He didn't really know what was going on between the Austin family and the Charles family, but watching Laura trying so hard to please Adah annoyed him. He felt like causing a little mischief.

"Wait for me a sec, I left something upstairs. I'll be back," Irvin said.

York just looked at him, but Jasper nodded enthusiastically. "We'll wait for you right here. Don't take too long."

"Got it, I'll be right back."

As soon as Irvin hurried off, York led Jasper to the waiting area and sat down. He glanced at Jasper, curiosity in his voice. "Who is that guy anyway?"

"He's Laurinda's classmate, and my good friend too. The doctor who's treating Laurinda is named Adolphus. I think he's from Cabinda."

"So is he coming home with you guys too?" York asked, a little surprised at how quickly strangers seemed to show up at his house after just one day away.

"Yep, Laurinda brought him. York,

are you driving us? If you can, could you bring Laurinda a change of clothes too? I already called the housekeeper and asked the kitchen to make some food so when Laurinda wakes up, she'll have something to eat."

"Alright. I'll drive you home. Sit tight for a bit while I go talk to Lacy."

"Okay, go ahead. I'll stay right here," Jasper replied, his eyes sparkling as he kept glancing toward the emergency room.

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[597 words]

York barely finished a quick exchange with Lacy before rushing back.

By the time he returned, Irvin was already there. York spotted the two of them from afar, heads close together, whispering about who knows what. Their eyes sparkled with a mischief that was impossible to miss. They looked like they'd just pulled off some kind of stunt.

"Alright, I'll drive you two home," York announced as he walked over.

Immediately, the secret conversation stopped. York glanced at them, curious, but didn't pry. He simply led them toward the parking lot.

As they neared the lot, they caught sight of two figures standing nearby. One was Adolphus. The other, York didn't recognize. It looked like they were in the middle of a serious talk.

"Sam?" Irvin muttered, the sight of Sam turning his mood sour in an instant.

Irvin bristled, ready to charge ahead, but York grabbed his arm and held him back. "You know that guy? Something happen between you two?"

Irvin scoffed. "As if I'd bother with a shameless jerk like him. Never mind. Let's just go home."

He shot one last glare, then seemed to deflate, clearly weighing his options. With Adolphus right there, picking a fight was out of the question. He'd have to wait for a better chance to deal with Sam.

York found Irvin's quick switch from angry to resigned pretty entertaining. No wonder he and Laurinda got along so well.

Back at the hospital, Bonnie stepped out of Laurinda's room and was immediately hit by a faint but unpleasant smell. At first, she figured it was just the usual musty scent that sometimes hung around Baily.

But the odor kept getting stronger. Soon, a nurse passing by wrinkled her nose and walked over, her tone gentle. "Mr. Baily, did you come here by yourself?"

Baily looked confused but answered honestly. "I came with my granddaughter. She's downstairs right now..."

The nurse studied him, trying to piece things together. He didn't really look like someone with dementia, but his answers wète over the place. First he said his granddaughter was in the room, now he claimed she was downstairs. Something wasn't right.

"How many granddaughters do you have?" the nurse asked, covering her nose as the smell grew even worse. She was starting to suspect the old man had had an accident and didn't even realize it.

"I have just one granddaughter. She's registering downstairs. Why? Are you looking for her? Her name is Laura. She should be in the ER right now."

Baily's chest puffed up a bit as he thought about how the Austin family was about to connect with the Charles family. He tried to grab the nurse's arm, eager to brag some more.

The nurse dodged his hand and gave him a polite smile. "Please wait right here, sir. I'll go get your granddaughter."

She hurried away, glancing back at the old man's crinkled grin. She didn't have high hopes, but she decided to try paging Laura over the hospital intercom.

Meanwhile, Bonnie had figured out what was going on. She stood there, pinching her nose, completely speechless Laurinda had never mentioned that Baily needed help

with this sort of thing. The smell was honestly unbearable.

Baily caught Bonnie's look of disgust and glared back at her. He had never liked the people Laurinda hung out with. In his eyes, they were all bad news.

Bonnie couldn't take it anymore. Gagging, she dashed to the bathroom, wondering what on earth the old man had eaten to smell so horrible.

Eventually, the nurse brought Laura upstairs. Even from a distance, Laura could smell it, but she still had a hard time believing Baily would ever have an accident like this.

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[598 words]

Baily wasn't actually losing his mind, so how could something like this even happen?

Laura walked over to him, but the smell hit her so hard she almost threw up. Her eyes started watering and she had to cover her mouth. At this point, it didn't matter what she believed. The awful stench coming from Baily said everything.

She was embarrassed and a little angry that he went out in public like this. Her voice was sharp when she spoke. "Grandpa, if your stomach was upset, why didn't you just use the bathroom? How could you go in your pants?"

"What are you talking about? Why would I ever..... That smell..." Baily's voice faded as the realization hit him. The stink was coming from him. He stared at his pants in disbelief. There was no way this was happening. He jumped up, but as he did, a warm trickle ran down his leg. He froze, his whole body going stiff.

A nurse nearby watched the whole thing. She felt a little sorry for him. Holding her nose, she tried to reassure him. "Don't worry, sir. This sort of thing happens all the time with Alzheimer's. Just go home and get cleaned up. It's nothing to be embarrassed about."

Baily's face burned with shame, but when he heard the word Alzheimer's, he exploded. He slapped the nurse across the face. "You're the one with Alzheimer's. Your whole family has it! I'm perfectly healthy. How dare you call me senile!"

The nurse wasn't about to just take it. She yelped and started crying. She couldn't hit him back, but she clung to Laura's arm and shouted about calling the police.

The noise drew a crowd. People came pouring out of their rooms. Some were filming, others snapping pictures on their phones.

Bonnie looked down at the mess around Baily's feet and felt sick herself. She quickly called the police for the nurse and then dialed the media. She didn't care if the whole world saw Baily's most humiliating moment.

Within the hour, everyone in Apex was talking about Baily soiling himself and slapping a nurse. The Austin family's reputation, already shaky, took another massive hit.

After he'd been cleaned up, Baily saw all the gossip online. He couldn't catch his breath and passed out on the spot.

The Austin family was thrown into chaos.

It was late at night when Laurinda blinked awake and saw a ridiculously handsome face leaning over her. She was still a little out of it. She licked her lips and croaked, Did order a male model? Because this guy is way too good-looking. I could get used to this..."

A laugh burst out, shattering the quiet.

Laurinda snapped fully awake and gave Adolphus, who was staring at her with a deadpan expression, an awkward smile. "Uh... sorry. I thought you were a male model..."

Laughter exploded from the people sitting on the sofa. They couldn't hold it in anymore. No one expected Laurinda to come out with something like that right after waking up.

"Go laugh outside," Laurinda muttered, her cheeks burning. She was half angry, half mortified.

The two quickly stifled their giggles and slipped out of the room.

Now it was just Laurinda and Adolphus. She felt the awkwardness settle in the air. She wanted to say something, but nothing seemed right, so she just flopped back down and pretended to be asleep.

Adolphus noticed her nerves and

restless little movements. He looked

at her blushing face and his

expression softened Gently, he

helped her roll onto her side so she'd
be more comfortable.

"Does it still hurt?" he asked softly.

"It does, but it's a lot better than before," Laurinda replied, her voice muffled by the
pillow.

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[677 words]

Laurinda knew she couldn't pretend to be asleep anymore. She opened her eyes
and shifted a little, feeling a dull ache all over her body. At least the weird pain in her
bones was gone, and she could handle the soreness.

She slid her hand out from under the blanket, planning to tuck it under her head. The
moment she caught sight of it, though, she froze. Both hands were wrapped in layers of
gauze, looking fat and awkward.

"Wait... why do my hands look like giant buns?" she blurted out.

She stared at her bandaged hands, which looked exactly like cartoon mitts. Laurinda
honestly couldn't believe it. Sure, she was hurt, but did they really have to wrap her
hands up like this? It was so inconvenient.

Adolphus couldn't help but smile at the way she was pouting. He looked at her with that
gentle, teasing look he always saved just for her.

"You hurt your hands pretty badly when you were holding the reins. When we cleaned
the wounds, we had to remove some damaged tissue and dirt. The injuries were
serious, so you're stuck with these cartoon hands for a while."

Laurinda's mouth dropped open. "Seriously? It's that bad? How am I supposed to go to
school like this?"

She looked honestly conflicted. She really liked school, but showing up with her hands
wrapped like this? There was no way her classmates wouldn't make fun of her.

Adolphus grinned, unable to hold back a laugh. "You like school that much? Then how come your total score for all six subjects doesn't even hit a hundred?"

He'd checked on her grades before. For three years of high school, not once had her exam scores ever added up to more than a hundred.

Laurinda gave him an exaggerated eye roll, dropping her bandaged hands onto the bed. "Who says you have to have good grades to like school? My grades might not be great, but I'm good at other stuff. I respect my teachers, I get along with everyone, I join all the activities, and I even helped the school build a new library and cafeteria. I designed the cafeteria myself, you know. The food is amazing. I'll take you there sometime."

Just talking about the cafeteria made Laurinda's stomach rumble. Suddenly, all she could think about was the school's spicy chicken. She hadn't eaten in ages.

"I'm starving. I want spicy chicken!"

Adolphus blinked, a little thrown by how quickly she could change topics. He stood up, adjusted the bed so she could sit up, and helped her get comfortable.

"Does that feel okay?"

Laurinda winced at the soreness in her body but took a deep breath, then nodded. "Yeah, I'm fine. It doesn't hurt too much."

Once he was sure she was settled, Adolphus went to grab the food from the insulated container.

As soon as Laurinda saw all those delicious dishes, her hunger hit her full force. Before she even realized it, her hand reached out.

Adolphus gently caught her awkward, bandaged fist and eased it back down. He spoke softly. "Drink some warm water first. I'll feed you."

He fed her with careful, gentle motions, and Laurinda ate happily, sometimes nudging him playfully with her little bandaged hands.

When she was finally full, Laurinda

leaned back against the pillows and

let out a long, satisfied sigh.

"Honestly, if I could just eat

something spicy, this would be

perfect."

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Adolphus shook his head. "No spicy food for you. Not until your hands have healed.

Nothing that might irritate your wounds."

Laurinda sat up a little straighter, her

eyes bright with hope. "But the medicine tastes pretty irritating too - Does that mean I don't have to drink it?"

She looked at him with those big, pleading eyes. She really hated taking medicine.

Every time she drank it, she felt sick for ages afterward.

Meeting her gaze, Adolphus felt his

resolve slipping. He started to rack

his brain for a way to help her

recover without having to force down that awful medicine.

Laurinda caught the hesitation on his face and grinned, sensing her chance. "Hey!

Why aren't you saying anything?"

She leaned in, determined to win him over. Laurinda was sure that if she kept pestering him, he'd eventually cave.

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Chapter 86

[643 words]

"You don't have to drink it while you're in the hospital. The IV and the meds might not mix well. Once you're out, I'll figure something else out for you. I'll try my best to keep

you off the medicine if that's what you want, but you still have to take care of your health."

With Adolphus giving in, Laurinda's mood lifted. She didn't push for more, just settled back, finally feeling like something good had come out of today's accident. At least she wouldn't have to choke down that awful medicine.

While Adolphus was tidying up the meal trays, his mind on how to help Laurinda get better, she suddenly spoke.

"That Adah girl... she's the one your family picked for you to marry, right?"

Adolphus spun around, shook his head fast, and jumped in. "No, not at all. I told you, I don't have a fiancée or some childhood sweetheart waiting for me. I get to decide who I marry. My family doesn't make those choices for me."

His eyes were steady and serious. He didn't want Laurinda getting the wrong idea. Thinking back to how she'd acted when they'd first met, he really wished he could track down whoever started the rumor about him being engaged and give them a piece of his mind.

"Relax, I wasn't accusing you of anything. I just asked. So, is there some business deal between your Lane family and the Charles family?"

Laurinda thought he looked even better when he was so determined, but she'd never admit how much she liked it. She just kept the questions coming.

Adolphus could tell she was in a good mood now. He loosened up and answered more casually.

"The Charles family is working on a project with one of our companies, the one my second brother runs. Besides that, there's not much between us. Do what you want. You don't need to worry about my brother."

Laurinda caught the hint in his words. Narrowing her eyes, she poked him with her hand, which was wrapped up like a cartoon character's paw.

"So, you and your second brother don't get along?"

"Not really. In my family, my sister's the only one I'm close to. The others... it's just whatever."

Laurinda nodded. She knew that in big families, "whatever" usually meant things were pretty complicated.

Thinking about how Adolphus ended up as the school doctor, she figured his spot in the Lane family probably wasn't great. The thought made her want to protect him a little more.

She reached out, wrapped her arm around his waist, and tugged him closer. Looking up at him, she grinned and blinked. "Stick with me. I

el?

promise you'll never get hungry"

Adolphus looked down, lips curving into a smile. His eyes crinkled, warm and playful. His voice came out low. "Are you offering to be my sugar mama?"

"It's not like that. I just mean... if you ever want something, just ask me. If I have it, it's yours."

"What if what I want is you?"

He leaned in suddenly, hands planted on either side of her on the bed, eyes locked on hers, waiting for her reaction.

Laurinda froze, thrown off by how

close he was, and the way he said it made her heart race. Instantly, she regretted teasing him. Why did she have to say things without thinking? She wished she could smack herself. What was she doing, flirting with him like that?

She couldn't look him in the eye, her gaze darting around the room. "Um..."

Adolphus realized he might have gotten ahead of himself. He let out a quiet laugh, then reached up and gently ruffled her messy hair.

"Guess I'll be counting on you to take care of me, then."

Laurinda just stared at him, totally thrown off.

She hadn't actually agreed to anything. What on earth was he talking about?

Adolphus just smiled, didn't explain, and went back to cleaning up.

A moment later, York and Bonnie came back in, breaking the quiet in the room.

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[647 words]

Bonnie offered to stay the night with Laurinda, and Laurinda was more than happy to let her.

Adolphus didn't really want to leave, but he still had unfinished business at the criminal investigation department. He decided not to fight it and left with York.

When they got to the parking lot, York spotted the flashy supercar right away. He was about to make a comment, but Adolphus just handed him the keys.

"I have to go to the department, and this car is a bit much for that. Let's swap," Adolphus said.

York took the keys and handed over his own, but didn't walk away right away. "So what's your plan for the Charles family?" York asked.

"I'm letting Laurinda have her fun. I'll handle whatever's left," Adolphus replied.

That caught York off guard. From what he'd found out, the Charles family was closely tied to the Lane family. Normally, if someone targeted the Charles family, the Lanes wouldn't just ignore it. That was exactly why York needed to ask.

"Are you sure the Lane family won't get involved if Laurinda goes after the Charles family?" York pressed.

"They won't," Adolphus said. "The only reason the Charles family is connected to us is because Len married Adah. My parents don't see them as worth their time. Do whatever you want. If anything happens, I'll take care of it."

Adolphus gave York a reassuring pat on the shoulder, letting him know he could move forward without worrying.

If he didn't know Laurinda so well-didn't know she liked to handle things her own way he would've already made sure the Charles family had a night they'd never forget.

At the hospital, Adah was frantically asking the nurse to help her contact the Charles family.

Her whole face was swollen, her eyes barely open, and she couldn't see a thing.

To make things worse, Laura had walked off with her purse. Her phone the only way she could reach her family-was gone too.

The nurse looked at her, exasperated. Adah kept demanding that she call her family, but refused to give her a single phone number.

The nurse wasn't a psychic. How was she supposed to know who to call?

"Look, I understand you want to reach your family, but I can't do anything unless you give me a number the nurse said. "I even offered to call the police so they could help, but you didn't want that either. I don't know what else I can do."

She let out a sigh. "On the bright side, your medical account has enough money to cover your treatment, so you can stay here and recover. Once you're better, you can go home."

With that, the nurse walked out without looking back. She was completely done with this woman, and honestly, it had been exhausting.

As soon as the door closed, Adah silently cursed Laura over and over. Why would Laura steal her purse? She wasn't the type who needed the money. How could she do something so low?

Adah refused to just accept it. The

pain in her face was only getting worse, and she wasn't about to sit

around and wait for things to get worse. She had to get out of here on her own.

She hit the callbutton again. The nurse came back, clearly irritated, staring at Adah like she was some kind of monster. "Is there actually something wrong? You're pressing this button way too much if you keep this up, we'll have to assume you're having a psychiatric episode and transfer you to the psych ward."

"I want to be transferred. I want to go to a hospital in Cabinda," Adah insisted, sitting up and turning her head toward the nurse's voice.

As soon as Adah turned, the nurse's face changed completely. She didn't say another word, just ran out to get the doctor on duty.

In less than ten minutes, Adah's face had gotten even worse. The nurse had worked at the hospital for years, but she'd never seen anything like this.

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Chapter 88

[582 words]

The next morning, Laurinda heard from Bonnie that someone had seen a "monster" in the hospital. When she found out it was Adah, the same woman who'd hurt her yesterday, her mind immediately went to Irvin.

As soon as Irvin and Jasper showed up, Laurinda sent Bonnie home, so it was just the three of them left in the room.

Jasper was feeding her breakfast, spooning porridge into her mouth one bite at a time. Across from her, Irvin sat on the sofa, staring at the floor, avoiding her gaze.

"So, are you going to explain what happened? Why did you go so hard on her?" Laurinda asked.

Irvin didn't feel even a little bit guilty. Adah had hurt Laurinda. She deserved a taste of her own medicine.

He also trusted his own skills. The effects of his powder looked serious, but after a week, all the symptoms would disappear. There wouldn't be any lasting harm-just a lot of pain in the meantime.

He finally lifted his head, sounding almost proud. "I don't think I went overboard at all. When I saw your hand all banged up, I actually thought I went too easy on her. If I could do it again, I'd use even more."

Irvin didn't even know why, but seeing Laurinda hurt had made him furious. He'd wanted to dump every last bit of his medicine on Adah.

Looking at how stubborn Irvin was, Laurinda didn't know what to say. He'd done it for her, after all.

Still, she couldn't help but worry. If anyone traced this back to Irvin, it could drag the Main Family into trouble.

Jasper noticed Laurinda's frown, and before she could get too upset, he picked up the pace, feeding her spoonful after spoonful of porridge.

She only realized what Jasper was up to when her cheeks were stuffed full. With her bandaged hand, she thumped his forehead, mumbling with her mouth full, "What are you doing, trying to choke me? Eine, I'll stop him, okay? Since when are you two so close anyway?"

Jasper just grinned, not embarrassed at all, and slowed down. He flashed her a sweet, apologetic smile. "Don't blame Irvin, Laurinda. You saw how dangerous things got yesterday. If you hadn't handled it so well, you and Kent both could've been in real trouble. What Adah's going through is nothing compared to that."

Thinking back on how close they'd come to disaster, Laurinda had to admit he was right. But she still didn't think Irvin should have taken things into his own hands for her sake.

Whatever. She would remember how good Irvin had been to her. From now on, he was one of her people, and she'd look out for him, too.

"Alright, you win. Irvin, thank you for sticking up for me. And thank you for saving Kent."

Laurinda meant it. Last night, she'd gone over Kent's medical report. He'd suffered some stress, but it was the mildest case possible. That was the best outcome she could hope for.

Irvin turned red at her gratitude, rubbing his hands together, looking more bashful than ever. "We're friends. I'm glad I could help."

Just then, Adolphus walked in and saw all three of them smiling together. Irvin, especially, was beaming his ears tinged pink. Something about the scene made Adolphus feel a little uneasy.

Was Irvin trying to steal his spot while he was gone?

"What's everyone laughing about?" Adolphus asked.

At the sound of his voice, Irvin's smile faded. He shot Adolphus a look full of resentment, which caught Laurinda's attention.

"Wait, did you two get into a fight?"

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Chapter 89

[576 words]

If Laurinda remembered right, Adolphus wasn't even at the hospital when Irvin showed up. So when could the two of them have possibly run into each other?

Adolphus looked just as confused by Irvin's attitude. He walked over to Jasper and took the bowl of porridge from his hands. "I seriously don't get what I did to piss you off, Irvin. If something's bothering you, just say it. Don't keep it bottled up."

Irvin glanced at Adolphus, sizing him up like he was nothing but a shallow playboy. He honestly had no clue what Laurinda even saw in this guy.

"I walked past Adah's room and saw you standing outside with her chart. If you care about Adah so much, why don't you go keep her company? What are you doing here with Laurinda?" Irvin raised his eyebrows at Adolphus, daring him to react. It was like he was saying, you told me to speak up, so don't blame me now.

Laurinda hadn't expected to hear that Adolphus visited Adah. She narrowed her eyes, giving him a look that basically said, this better be a good excuse or you can get lost.

"Adah? Where is Adah? When I got to the hospital this morning, the director did call me in for a consultation, but I don't remember meeting anyone named Adah. You can't just accuse me of stuff like that." Adolphus looked completely lost. He was sure he hadn't seen Adah. Just yesterday, he'd even told Sam to find someone and break her brother's leg after they got back to Cabinda.

Laurinda leaned back against the bed, watching Adolphus closely. He really didn't look like he was lying.

"What case were you looking at then?" she asked.

"It was an allergy patient. They couldn't figure out what caused it, but her face was covered in these horrible welts..." Adolphus stopped, suddenly realizing something. He turned toward Irvin, who was now staring down at his phone, silent and sheepish.

"I told Foley to get rid of all your crazy inventions. Why do you still have some?" Adolphus's tone turned cold.

Irvin kept his head down, his earlier smugness completely gone.

At that moment, Laurinda was sure Adolphus honestly had no idea that the woman with the weird rash was Adah. She reached out with her little hand and poked him. "I'm still hungry."

She opened her mouth, waiting for Adolphus to feed her again.

Adolphus couldn't help but sigh at how cute she looked. He picked up a scallion pancake and held it to her lips, speaking quietly. "You have no idea how much trouble Irvin

caused back in

Cabinda. Why do you think he's here?"

Laurinda had seen what Irvin's inventions could do. She couldn't hide her admiration. "He's an adult. He knows what's right and wrong. He wouldn't hurt anyone for no reason. If he ever does, it's because that person deserved it, not because

he'd hurt an innocent person."

Honestly, Laurinda felt like Adah had it coming. If Adah hadn't come after her, Irvin wouldn't have done anything.

"Exactly. Irvin only did it to stand up

for Laurinda. If it weren't for that woman, Laurinda wouldn't have gotten hurt in the first place. Irvin did nothing wrong. Unlike some people who pretend to like Laurinda, but still, go help that awful woman Jasper stepped in front of Irvin, ready to defend him. After everything that happened yesterday, he and Irvin had already become close friends.

Watching Jasper stand up for Irvin and take on Adolphus made Laurinda laugh. Her little brother really was the best.

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Chapter 90

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Adolphus watched the three of them, all on the same wavelength, and bit his lip. He couldn't help feeling a little left out, like he was the only outsider in the room.

He offered Laurinda another spoonful of oatmeal. The seriousness in his eyes faded, replaced by a slightly hurt expression. "Pretty sure Jasper's tired of having me around."

Laurinda gave him a look of sympathy and nodded. "You're not wrong. It's not just a feeling. He really is over you. Those two are basically glued together now. Don't waste your energy fighting it, just accept your fate."

Eating slowly was starting to tire Laurinda out. She cupped Adolphus's hand with her own little bandaged hands and finished the rest of the oatmeal in one go.

"Finally full," she sighed contentedly.

Watching her look so satisfied, Adolphus's eyes softened. He pulled out a tissue, gently wiping her mouth. "How are you feeling? Does anything still hurt? Want me to give you another massage in a bit?"

Laurinda stretched a little and realized she felt a lot better than yesterday. She grinned at him and nodded. "Yeah, that sounds good."

If Adolphus was offering to pamper her, she definitely wasn't going to say no.

Adolphus finished off what was left of her breakfast, tidied up the table, and glanced at the two boys still sitting on the sofa. He remembered something Jasper had said and turned to Laurinda. "I have to go take care of something. I'll be back in twenty minutes."

"Alright, go ahead," Laurinda said.

She actually wanted to talk to Irvin anyway. Adolphus's timing couldn't have been better.

Once he left Laurinda's room, Adolphus headed quickly toward Adah's ward. As soon as he stepped off the elevator, he heard shouting coming from inside.

Passing the nurses' station, he noticed a few nurses looking completely drained. He went straight into the department head's office.

Five minutes later, the head of dermatology came out, looking way more cheerful than before. He said something to the nurses and suddenly their faces lit up.

They sprang into action. In no time, Adah was packed up and sent straight to the psych ward. The whole department instantly went quiet.

After four days in the hospital, Laurinda was at her wits' end. All she could do was lie in bed, her hands wrapped up so tight she couldn't even use her phone. She was bored out of her mind.

Irvin and Jasper had both gone back to school, so she'd lost her only source of fun. She was honestly miserable.

After morning rounds, Adolphus came by to change her bandages himself. The wounds on her hands had finally scabbed over. She didn't have to keep her bands wrapped up like cartoon fists anymore. She was SOT relieved to finally have her fingers back.

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"Are we going home today?" Laurinda looked at Adolphus with big, hopeful eyes, like she was about to throw a fit if he said no.

Adolphus glanced out the window at the softly falling snow, thinking it over. "Yeah, we can go home. But you still have to be careful okay? No. getting your hands wet. You have to put ointment on every day, on time."

"No problem," Laurinda agreed right away. She would have promised almost anything if it meant getting out of the hospital.

Seeing how eager she was to leave, Adolphus helped her get dressed, then left to handle the discharge paperwork. When he came back, he was pushing a wheelchair.

Laurinda frowned at the wheelchair by the bed. She was feeling fine except for her hands. There was no reason she needed a wheelchair to leave, was there?

And honestly, just looking at it brought back memories of those dark months when she'd needed one before. It made her uncomfortable.

"My hands are the only thing hurt. Everything else is fine. I can walk out of here myself."

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