

N Destiny 2401

Chapter 2401

Soon, dawn came bearing down on its citizens. Shirley had a good night's sleep after all the drinking. Zacharias had a meeting that day but didn't request for Shirley to accompany him there. The meeting would go on for a long time. So, he knew she might become bored if she went.

Imogen caught wind of that. So, she started coming up with a plan, and she asked Roy, "Captain Barlowe, may I stay back with Shirley?"

Roy refused it at first. Then, he had an audience with Zacharias and told him about Imogen's request. Zacharias knew Imogen was Shirley's friend, so he promptly agreed to it, "She can stay with Shirley."

Zacharias' motorcade left. The landline for Shirley's room rang. It was a call from Imogen. "Yes?"

"Shirley? It's me. I stayed back, too. Mr. Flintstone wanted me to go shopping with you."

Shirley was going to buy some presents for her parents and grandmother. Flor was known for its craftwork. It wasn't every day she could go overseas. Hence, she wanted to bring back some souvenirs for her family. "Sure, we'll go around." Shirley didn't suspect her friend was up to something.

Imogen heaved a sigh of relief. This is divine providence. She picked up her other phone and called her mafia friend. Then, she told them about the job in a foreign language, cautious that someone would overhear their conversation.

"Got it, Nora. We'll do as you say."

"Don't hold back, you guys. And don't show me any mercy. You have to make her believe we're both the victims here."

"Got it."

Imogen dressed herself up and told Shirley to meet up with her in the lobby. Shirley came down a while later. Imogen happily held her arm as she remarked lightly, "You're getting prettier every day, Shirley. Mr. Flintstone showered you with love, I presume?"

Shirley knew that Imogen had seen everything the night before, and she smiled awkwardly. "My feet were sore, so..."

"I know. Everyone knows how much Mr. Flintstone likes you. I'm really happy for you. Sorry about what I said. I only adore Mr. Flintstone. I don't have any romantic feelings for him," said Imogen. She wanted Shirley to know she was a smart woman who knew her place.

Shirley smiled at her. "You'll find someone who loves you too."

"I hope so. Let's go. I checked the place. There is a shopping district around here. We're going to have so much fun," said Imogen.

Shirley and Imogen hailed a ride to the shopping district. It didn't take them long to arrive there. There were a lot of shops selling handmade items, and no two shops were alike. Shirley immediately picked one establishment and chose her presents.

Imogen was waiting for her at the coffee shop outside. She wasn't buying anything. Instead, she was busy talking to her co-conspirators.

An off-road vehicle came to a stop before her a while later. The window rolled down, and the guy who was supposed to be her partner was in there. They said a quiet hello and went on with the plan.

Now, they needed Imogen to take Shirley to their coffee shop. Once there, Shirley would be well within their trap.

Just then, Shirley returned with two items. Imogen complained, "Their coffee sucks. Let's find another shop."

Shirley nodded. So, Imogen held her arm and made their way to the coffee shop she and her fellow kidnappers designated. "That one looks nice, Shirley. She pointed at that coffee shop.

"Not a lot of customers, though." Shirley frowned.

Chapter 2402

Shirley looked at the men at the doors. "Step aside. One of the men leered at them before suggesting lewdly, "Oh, you two are pretty. We love ladies of your race. Why don't we have a cup of coffee?"

"I said, step aside," said Shirley darkly. I guess I have to fight our way out. Another man snapped up a steel bat and swung it on Imogen's head. Imogen blacked out and fell to the ground.

"Imogen!" Shirley looked at her fallen friend. She clenched her fists, staring at the men around her.

This was part of Imogen's plan. She wanted these men to take her out first. Shirley wouldn't dream of leaving her behind. That way, they would have a chance to capture her. She knew Shirley all too well. That woman was not someone who would leave a friend behind. Instead, she'd do her best to escape together with Imogen.

Imogen was right on the money. Shirley was not someone who would escape alone. She wouldn't leave her unconscious friends with these b*stards. When one of the guys tried to get close, Shirley swiftly took a chair and hurled it right at him.

Caught by surprise, the man flew back through the air. It also told his companions that Shirley was a fighter. Soon enough, four of them ganged up on her. These were no ordinary men, they were veteran mercenaries who'd gone through bloody battles themselves. Shirley might be a fighter, but she had no chance against these people.

Nearly fifteen minutes had gone by since Shirley fought these four. It was hard for her to do battle in a cramped space like this coffee shop. Due to her brief inattention, someone took the opportunity to slam a chair into her back. Shirley immediately went down on her knees. Just then, she saw someone taking Imogen on his shoulders and walking to a room.

"Let her go!" Shirley roared, darting after that man. Alas, someone immediately blocked her path. Although the four men were hurt, Shirley was their quarry this time. They had to have her.

Shirley had to face a punch and evade everyone else's attacks. She was stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Imogen was taken to a quiet room. She was genuinely unconscious moments ago. Nonetheless, she had managed to regain consciousness soon enough as she opened her bleary eyes. Then, she rubbed the back of her head, feeling the bump as she said, "You did good, people."

A middle-aged man hugged her. "Nora, you're one of us. You made us worried sick."

Imogen smirked as she revealed her true self, picking up a cigarette, and had a hit. Obviously, this wasn't her first time smoking. "Finish this job, and you'll be making tons of money. You can't afford to fail."

"You can trust those guys. They'll take her down eventually."

Ten minutes later, one of the men came in. "We took her down."

Imogen puffed out a ring of smoke. "Be careful. Don't let her run away."

"She can fight. Broke Casa's leg."

"Don't underestimate her. She's a great fighter back in our base." Imogen sat on the couch. "And now you're going to let me go. I'll return and tell our boss to prepare the ransom for her."

"You sure he can afford it?"

"You underestimate her. Her father is in command of the largest base back home. She is also part of the president's family. Plus, my boss is trying to date her right now. She's worth a ton."

The kidnapers were shocked. They had no idea Shirley was this important, and they were instantly seized by fear. They wanted money, but not at the cost of their lives.

“Why didn’t you tell us who she really is, Nora? We should never target people like her.”

Imogen sneered as she snarked, “You don’t strike me as cowards. No pain, no gain. She’s your only ticket to one billion dollars at one go. That’s enough money to last you a lifetime.”

Chapter 2403

“Where’s the person?” asked the leader.

“In the hall. Her limbs are bound while her mouth is taped shut. There’s also a hood covering her head.” Imogen stood up. “Don’t worry. Now that she’s in your hands, you’ll get the money soon.”

Then, as she walked to the side, she spoke to one of the men. “Take me outside. I’ll pretend that I’ve escaped.”

Although the leader was somewhat startled, the prospect of a handsome reward convinced him to proceed boldly with the plan.

Since they had already kidnapped their intended target, he signaled to his subordinate, who then escorted Imogen outside. As soon as she stepped out, she exclaimed, “Shirley? Shirley! Are you okay?”

“Ugh!” At this moment, Shirley couldn’t see anything with her face covered and mouth taped shut. When she heard Imogen’s voice, she struggled to respond.

“Let her go. Let her go!” Imogen exclaimed. Right after she said those words, she was attacked, and the sound of punches landing on someone reverberated in the air. Soon, there was a sound of people fighting, followed by a shattering window.

Then, her voice came through. “Wait for me, Shirley. I’ll look for help to rescue you.”

Shirley heard the sound of the broken window and Imogen’s panicked escape. Shortly after, she also heard several men speaking.

“Sh*t. She escaped. How can you guys be so careless? Hurry, you idiots. Don’t let these two women escape!”

Imogen hailed a passing cab and headed toward the Royal Hotel. She had deliberately allowed the kidnapers to maim her hand so that she could explain to Zacharias that she had lost her ability to save Shirley, which was why she had to return for assistance.

After witnessing Imogen’s successful escape, Shirley breathed a sigh of relief. However, she had seen and experienced the skills of those men earlier, and it was evident that they were not ordinary thugs. The fact that Imogen could break free and escape was a surprise to Shirley, but thankfully, Imogen was able to flee.

“Bring her inside for me,” a rough male voice instructed. Then, he added, “Until we receive the money, make sure that she doesn’t escape.”

Shirley was perplexed as to why she was their target. When she overheard their conversation, she finally understood. Their intention was to use her to extort money, but from who? Was it Zacharias?

She wasn’t surprised as they had both attended the banquet together. If someone had taken photos during the event, it could have created the illusion that she was Zacharias’ woman. Kidnapping her would then be a means of demanding money from Zacharias.

Abominable!

Her limbs were bound, and her mouth was taped shut with a hood covering her head, so she could only rely on her sense of hearing to assess her surroundings.

Meanwhile, the vehicle that Imogen was in arrived at the hotel. She rushed inside, located her team members, and instructed them to inform Zacharias about the ongoing situation immediately.

“Imogen, your hand...” A team member expressed concern about Imogen’s hand.

“It’s fine. It’s just broken. Once the bones are set, it’ll be okay. It’s Shirley... She... She was kidnapped by those *sshholes. Her life is in danger now.” Imogen gasped as she feigned a sense of unbearable pain.

The teammate immediately rang Roy. “Hello, Captain Barlowe. Miss Lloyd was kidnapped by gangsters fifteen minutes ago. They’re demanding money from Mr. Flintstone.”

“What?!” Roy was shocked to hear the news, never once expecting that gangsters would dare to target Mr. Zacharias.

Chapter 2404

Zacharias tensed up and immediately stood up. He calmly approached the vice president, who was in the meeting, and requested assistance. “Mr. Vice President, I need help.”

The vice president nodded upon recognition of Zacharias’ urgent expression. So, they moved to a nearby lounge, where Zacharias briefed him on Shirley’s kidnapping. Zacharias knew they had to cooperate with local authorities since relying solely on their resources in such a vast territory in Flor would make rescuing Shirley challenging.

“What? Someone dared to kidnap your girlfriend?” the vice president was just as shocked because he never expected such an act damaging their mutual interests to take place on the day that the two nations formed a friendship.

Zacharias felt an overwhelming sense of urgency. He immediately ordered someone to bring Imogen over, instructing her to relate the entire incident and provide the specific location of the kidnapers.

Imogen was escorted to the lounge. She had been on edge in the car because when she initially planned this, she never expected Zacharias to collaborate with the vice president of Flor. The gangsters now not only had to face Zacharias but also the entire police force of Flor.

At this moment, her thoughts shifted. She decided to eliminate those gangsters and could gain recognition or even glory once she returned to her country. She couldn’t care less whether Shirley lived or died.

If Shirley survived, that would be great because she could continue to manipulate Shirley.

If Shirley died, then Imogen would feel more at peace because it meant that she would no longer need to be subjected to the continuous comparison of their lives.

Moreover, with Shirley's death, Zacharias would be in unbearable pain. Perhaps there would even be an opportunity for Imogen to take advantage of the situation!

As for her association with the kidnapers, she had always remained incognito when dealing with them. So, if she killed them all, no one would know that she was in contact with them anymore.

When Imogen saw Zacharias, her hand had just been treated for the injuries, and visible marks of intense combat adorned her body.

"Imogen, quickly tell me what happened. Why was Shirley kidnapped?" Zacharias disregarded his status as he approached her, his gaze filled with intense concern.

"Mr. Zacharias, I'm sorry. I was incompetent, as I couldn't rescue Shirley. There were seven or eight men, all of whom were mercenaries. I don't know how they found out about Shirley's identity, but it seems like she was their target," she explained. "I'm sure it's because of last night's banquet where you and Shirley were together. It made those gangsters believe that you would pay a large ransom if they kidnapped her."

His fists clenched instantly. Though he wished to tear those b*stards apart, he had to restrain himself and stay calm. Shirley's safety was the utmost priority.

Imogen bit her lip, guilt evident in her eyes.

"Imogen, are there any distinctive features about those people? Where was the last place that Shirley disappeared?" he asked urgently.

"I've written it down. In this bar, there were five foreigners and two mixed-race individuals. They look like they are well-trained mercenaries. Mr. Zacharias, please hurry to rescue Shirley. I'm afraid if we delay any longer, she will be..." she trailed off deliberately, wanting to stoke Zacharias' righteous anger. She hoped he would join forces with the Florian military to crush those gangsters, thus erasing any trace of her association with them.

Zacharias' complexion rapidly darkened as veins bulged on his forehead. He handed the address of the said bar to the Florian authorities, who promptly mobilized all of their resources to track the whereabouts of these individuals.

The surveillance footage was quickly retrieved and showed Imogen and Shirley entering the bar. About fifteen minutes later, Imogen emerged from the bar in a disheveled state after escaping through a broken window.

She stood behind the investigators and observed the results of the investigation. At this point, everything she had done seemed flawless. Then, she explained, "I left my phone inside when I escaped. I could only return to the hotel to contact you."

Chapter 2405

Soon, the person in charge discovered who the hotel's owner was and realized the hotel's bar had stopped operations for over a month. However, the bar suddenly reopened. So, those men pretended to be the bar's employees and kidnapped Shirley after leading the girls inside. Then, Imogen said, "We were just tired from shopping and realized a cafe was open there. So, we went in to take a break. We didn't know we'd be locked inside."

After that, the cops spotted the kidnappers leaving the bar through the surveillance camera that was facing the back alley. The police locked onto the kidnappers' car and started tracking them.

At the same time, Zacharias' phone rang from an unfamiliar number from Flor. He looked at the phone and told the cops. "I think the kidnappers are calling me."

"You may answer the phone, Mr. Flintstone. We've set up the tracking device."

So, Zacharias answered the phone. "Hello."

"Hi, Mr. Zacharias Flintstone. We know who you are, and I'm sure you know who we are, too. Your woman is currently in our hands. Now, you have five minutes to decide. I'll give you an account number. Transfer 150 million to us, and she stays alive."

"I'll do it. Please don't hurt her," Zacharias said without hesitation. He needed to play along with these kidnapers, his only concern being Shirley's well-being.

"That's quick of you. It truly brings joy to engage in a deal with someone of your stature." The person on the other end of the phone laughed. "Remember. Five minutes. After that, I'll send that woman's limbs to you through this number."

"Don't hurt her!" Zacharias exclaimed. However, the kidnapper had already ended the call. Ren, standing next to Zacharias, immediately reassured him, saying, "Don't worry. We'll advance the money since we'll get it back sooner or later."

"Thank you."

"It's us who should be sorry," Ren replied. Then, Zacharias passed the phone to his men when an account number appeared on the screen. The men promptly entered the account number and the sum of 150 million.

"Wait for two minutes before sending it," Zacharias instructed in a low tone. If they send it over too quickly, the kidnapers might suspect that he was working with the police. So, the two-minute delay could help dispel the kidnapers' suspicion.

Imogen stood behind Zacharias, watching the unfolding events with a tight grip on her emotions. Surprisingly, he remained composed, leaving her uncertain about his thoughts. All she could do was follow him, and she swore to kill those kidnapers when the opportunity arose.

Meanwhile, Shirley was taken to a suburb 10 miles away from the city and tied to a chair with her head covered. However, her figure was still enough to excite the kidnapers as they leered at her, contemplating an opportune moment to do the deed.

Ding! Suddenly, the sound of a message rang, and the man who was working on the computer shouted, "It's here! The money's in! 150 million. It f*cking is 150 million! We're rich!"

"We'll each get around 15 million. This is awesome!" All the kidnapers were ecstatic as this was their biggest win.

“Are you sure the money’s in?”

“Let’s withdraw some money to check if it’s a bad check or actual money.”

With that, they drove to the nearest bank and swiftly withdrew 150 thousand before returning to their hideout. They were in a state of euphoria.

“Boss, are we seriously letting this woman go?”

“I’ve not played with girls of her race. She’s a 10 out of 10. I wanna see what it’s like to hook up with her before we let her go.”

“You guys better recall whose woman she is. If you don’t want to risk your life while the money’s on the table, drop that notion while you still can!” the kidnapper leader reminded them coldly. “I’m going to take a nap. You guys watch her.” He was feeling tired after relaxing from his tense state. So, he wanted to take the opportunity to rest as they would need to make a run for it at night.

Chapter 2406

Unbeknownst to the kidnappers, their location was already being locked on. Zacharias motorcade and the cops’ special forces were coming in their direction.

Roy didn’t want Imogen to come along on this mission, but she insisted, and he reluctantly agreed. The satellite footage indicated that the kidnappers remained at their base without any movement.

The plan was simple-send out a search party and thoroughly search the surrounding area for Shirley.

Imogen wore a headset and was orchestrating every move discreetly. Who would suspect her? Not even Zacharias, who unknowingly expressed gratitude for her involvement in the plan.

“The kidnappers are gathered in one location. Our strategy is simple-send a team to encircle them. The rest of you fan out and locate the hostage. Exercise caution; these aren’t ordinary kidnappers. They might be armed with heavy weaponry. If they pose a threat, shoot to kill,” the person in charge said.

She smiled since everything was unfolding just as she had planned.

Meanwhile, Shirley was imprisoned in a room. Her eyes were closed, and she was waiting for someone to rescue her. Suddenly, footsteps echoed from the entrance, accompanied by an audible gulp. The sound repulsed her as she sensed someone attempting to approach her with malicious intent. A fierce anger ignited in her eyes at the thought of impending violation.

Since everyone else was playing poker, this kidnapper said he wanted to take a restroom break, but he actually wanted to violate Shirley. It became apparent that he was driven by his unsavory desires, with Shirley's flawless physique serving as an irresistible allure. He'd rather give away all his money if it meant he could rail this Eastern woman. "Ah, what a perfect woman. The vice president's lover is something else, after all," the man gasped.

She said nothing. Every inch of her body was prepared to fight back once the man tried to make a move.

"Don't worry, I won't kill you. Just want you to make me happy." The man pulled away the thing covering her head, and he was met with her murderous gaze, but he loved feisty women like her.

Just a moment ago, her head was covered, and she had no idea what kind of surroundings she was dealing with. Now that she had a clear line of sight, she would use anything to escape this situation. Suddenly, she put on a seductive smile, subtly suggesting to the kidnapper that he should release her.

The man's heart started to race, his thoughts consumed by desire. He quickly untied her, thinking it would make it easier for her to get on her knees and give him fellatio.

Now, she found herself with only her hands and legs restrained, and the binding around her body had loosened. The kidnapper, having only shown up to clean up the coffee shop mess, had missed her previous scuffle. While acknowledging her potential capabilities, he believed they were manageable.

Just when the guy was going to lift Shirley, she swiftly pivoted, circling the kidnapper. Seizing the opportunity, she clasped her hands around the man's neck, pulling them backward, utilizing the chain of her handcuffs to choke him. The man's eyes widened, and he tried to grasp her hands for relief. However, she retaliated by driving her foot into his back, causing the kidnapper to arch forward.

The handcuffs cut into the man's neck, causing blood to spill. Only after dealing with him did she finally release her grip. With a sigh of relief, she knew she had to escape quickly. Her thoughts raced, believing that Zacharias must be en route to rescue her. So, she had to find a way to reach out to him.

Shirley deftly retrieved a small knife from the man's pocket and promptly unfettered herself from the restraints. Having acquired the skill to free herself when handcuffed, she easily removed the fetters moments later. Without hesitation, she made her exit.

Chapter 2407

Shirley had lost her handphone and bag. If she wanted to escape, she had to find other means of communication. She vaulted over the walls and escaped.

One of the kidnappers suspected his accomplice was taking an unusually long time in the bathroom. Having just left the restroom moments ago, he surmised the other guy might be checking the room where Shirley was held captive. However, upon entering, he was met with the lifeless body of his companion, leaving him in utter shock. "She escaped."

"What? She escaped?" The leader made up his mind to leave right after that. "Not our problem. We have to leave now."

Suddenly, the unmistakable sound of rotor blades filled the air, accompanied by infrared beams piercing through the windows.

"The cops are here! Get your weapons!" the leader roared. Quickly, his henchmen whipped out guns and fired off at the windows.

Since the kidnappers initiated the attack, the cops weren't about to remain passive. They swiftly deployed a team to confront the kidnappers.

Zacharias was in the car, and he turned to Roy, who was behind him. "Give me a gun. I'm going to search for Shirley myself."

"Sir, it's not safe for you to leave. We've got this," Roy urged.

Zacharias insisted, "Give me the gun."

"I can't allow that, sir. I'm sorry." Roy got out of the car and locked the doors. He instructed four of his men to guard the vehicle while he and the others charged into the crossfire.

Imogen was among those who rushed into the crossfire, determined to locate Shirley as soon as possible. Wearing a mask to avoid recognition by the kidnappers, Imogen hid herself at a higher vantage point, opened fire, and shot dead two of the fleeing kidnappers. After all, her sole objective was to ensure that none of the kidnappers could escape.

"Let me out!" Zacharias, locked in the car, was driven to madness. His eyes were red as he observed the house caught in the crossfire. Desperately banging on the window, his hand was swollen and bleeding.

The bodyguards, however, couldn't yield to his pleas. Zacharias' safety was paramount; they were willing to bear any sacrifice to protect him.

Meanwhile, Shirley had sprinted a considerable distance, but the sound of gunfire reached her ears. She panted heavily, pausing to observe the crossfire for a few moments before hastily retracing her steps.

At that moment, the cops were hit by heavy artillery. One of the choppers was struck down as well. Then, the cops decided they would wipe out the never-do-goods.

Roy and his team were searching for Shirley. They came into a room, and he saw the chair and rope. The sight delighted him, thinking, Could she have escaped?

One of Roy's men said, "Captain, get out. They're going to wipe out this whole place."

"We can't back out before we find Miss Lloyd."

"They're getting out the heavy artillery. Things have gotten out of hand. We need to escort the vice president to safety."

Roy was reminded of his true mission. While saving Shirley and ensuring her safety was important, the primary goal was to ensure Zacharias remained unharmed. This decision had the potential to jeopardize Roy's job, but he ordered his men to retreat nonetheless.

At that moment, Imogen lay atop a tree branch, her gaze fixed on the door below. She didn't withdraw; instead, she kept watch. If any kidnappers emerged, she was ready to shoot them.

Shortly after Roy and his team emerged, the cops unleashed heavy artillery, reducing the houses to ruins. The kidnappers, shocked, were on the verge of arrest when Imogen swiftly killed them.

As the cops moved in to apprehend the criminals, they were met with lifeless bodies. Despite an extensive search for Shirley, they found no trace.

It wasn't until the cops informed Roy that all the kidnappers had been killed that he finally unlocked the car doors. Instantly, a powerful fist struck his face, causing Roy to collapse onto the ground.

Zacharias was seething with anger, and if looks could kill, Roy would have met his end. Zacharias, brimming with fury, charged into the sea of flames.

"Sir, sir!" Ignoring his pain, Roy quickly got back on his feet and led his team after Zacharias.

Chapter 2408

Zacharias was met with nothing but ruins. All the houses had been destroyed. If Shirley were really here, she'd be buried six feet under.

"Shirley? Shirley!" he shouted, his voice filled with despair. As he fell to his knees, his mind became a blank canvas.

Imogen had come down as well. She stood around, watching, her heart filled with delight. She rejoiced in her heart, muttering, Finally, the woman I hate the most is dead, and I killed all the kidnappers. There's nothing to worry about anymore. However, a familiar voice interrupted her thoughts. "Zacharias."

That voice was salvation for Zacharias. He turned and spotted a slender figure emerging through the smoke-filled surroundings-it was Shirley. She had survived. Tears welled up in his eyes, and the sight of her resurrected his cold, lifeless heart. "Shir!" He hurried toward her.

Shirley, too, ran to meet him, and amidst the swirling smoke, they embraced. Imogen watched, her eyes wide. She couldn't believe Shirley had escaped instead of dying in the explosion.

"Where were you? I was worried sick!" Zacharias ruffled Shirley's hair, and he kissed her dust-covered cheek. Only her warmth could affirm that everything around him was still real. She smiled. "I'm sorry for worrying you. I got out before that sh*tstorm went down."

He hugged her tightly, and this time, he would not let her go.

When Shirley directed her gaze at Imogen, panic seized Imogen. Unsure if the kidnappers had exposed her involvement, she wondered, Could she have found out I was involved too? Anxious, Imogen observed Shirley, who seemed normal, but Imogen felt the ominous ticking of a bomb in her heart.

Despite feeling suffocated by the hug, Shirley sensed Zacharias' love. Observing his tears, she thought, He must have believed I was gone. Look at him, crying. They say men only cry when their hearts are shattered. When she had seen him earlier, kneeling and crying, she couldn't help but empathize with him. She made a silent vow never to cause him to worry like that again.

Roy, with a still-swollen cheek, suggested, "This isn't the best place to linger, sir. We should head back to the hotel quickly."

Finally releasing her from the hug, Zacharias held onto her hand tightly, unwilling to let her go just yet.

Then, she noticed Roy's swollen cheek. Concerned, she said, "Mr. Barlowe, you're hurt."

Roy quickly explained, "It's nothing. I tripped."

"He didn't. I punched him." Zacharias harrumphed.

Shirley looked at him, surprised. "What? Why'd you do that to him?"

"Because he deserved it," Zacharias snapped. He almost wanted to kill Roy for locking him in the car. One punch seemed like a small retaliation.

A little aggrieved, Roy said, "The vice president wanted a gun. He wanted to come in and save you. I had no choice but to lock him in the car. I deserved that punch."

She looked at Zacharias seriously. "You cannot hit him the next time he does this."

Perplexed, Zacharias asked, "Why?"

"Because he was doing the right thing," Shirley said solemnly. She thought, That was what Roy should do. He couldn't let Zacharias risk himself, especially when he was going to be reckless about it.

And then Zacharias felt aggrieved. "I was going to save you."

"In that situation? I don't need your help. If anything happens to you, I don't think I could deal with it." She looked tense.

Roy was happy and touched that Shirley took his side and defended him.

Chapter 2409

Roy thought to himself, I knew she was a reasonable woman. Zacharias put an arm around Shirley's shoulder and led her to the car. He said, "I won't let something like this happen again."

She hoped nothing like this ever happened again, even if the only reason was for him not to risk himself once more.

Imogen followed them. She looked at the ruins behind her and felt relieved inside, thinking, Finally got rid of the kidnappers. Now, I just have to keep an eye on her. I hope she didn't get suspicious of me.

Shirley entered the car, and Zacharias, noticing her grimy face, gently wiped away the dust. When he saw how unkempt her hair was, he asked curiously, "How did you get out?"

"Some guy came to give me food. I killed him, took his dagger, and unfettered myself. You guys came less than ten minutes after that," she said.

"Did they..." He hesitated, knowing the sensitivity of the question but needing to know the answer. She shook her head. "No. They were eager to split the ransom. They know who I am, and they wouldn't dare to touch me."

Zacharias heaved a sigh of relief. He trusted Shirley unconditionally.

Roy, nursing his swollen cheek, took the co-driver's seat. "We could've kept some of them alive and grilled them for answers, but they were all killed. We might have to put this case away now. Flor might not even be able to give us an explanation."

"All of them died?" She frowned, hoping to keep a few alive for questioning.

"Yeah, all dead. Well, three escaped, but Imogen sniped them off. She did well in this operation," Roy commended Imogen for her contribution to the smooth rescue and total obliteration of the kidnappers.

Shirley fell into a brief silence, then nodded. "Yeah, Imogen's quick thinking in making that escape is the reason you guys reached me so fast."

Zacharias noticed she was looking exhausted. Fighting the kidnappers must've taken a lot out of her, and he put an arm around her shoulder. "Just set everything aside for now. Close your eyes and rest."

Resting in his embrace, she closed her eyes, though sleep eluded her. Her mind buzzed with questions about the entire incident. Why was I the one kidnapped? The coffee shop was swarming with kidnappers, yet only Imogen and I entered.

Shirley recalled that Imogen had stopped at another coffee shop earlier. They should have returned to the hotel after buying the gifts. They shouldn't have entered that coffee shop. Suddenly, a chilling

thought crossed her mind, but she dismissed it immediately. She couldn't believe Imogen would intentionally involve her in this mess.

Shirley reasoned, She probably just wanted another cup of coffee because the other shop's brew didn't suit her. Reflecting on the ordeal, she remembered how the kidnappers had taken Imogen away after entering the coffee shop, leaving Shirley to fight the rest in the lobby. Shirley's back bore bruises, and her arm throbbed from the sprain.

And then Shirley remembered something else. Why didn't the kidnappers cuff Imogen after they took her away? They cuffed me the moment they got me. Another detail struck her. Why didn't the kidnappers handcuff Imogen after taking her away? They cuffed me as soon as they got me. Shirley couldn't find an explanation, and then she remembered the duration of the struggle. It lasted at least ten minutes, and Imogen was never handcuffed. In fact, she fought the kidnappers and escaped afterward. Could they have been after me the whole time? That might explain why they were lenient with Imogen. Perhaps that's the reason.

Shirley didn't suspect that Imogen was behind this. They'd been friends for five years. Unless Imogen displayed clear signs of betrayal, Shirley wouldn't doubt her. No one would.

Chapter 2410

Shirley felt Zacharias' lips brushing her forehead. His scent smelled nice, and it filled her with a sense of security. She even felt sleepy.

Meanwhile, in the other car, Imogen replayed the entire failed plan in her mind, convinced she hadn't shown any vulnerabilities. The only uncertainty was whether the kidnappers betrayed her. She believed they wouldn't, as it served no purpose and would expose her as part of their group.

Once back at the hotel, Zacharias took Shirley back to the room. In the consistently warm space, Shirley removed her jacket. Then, a hushed voice broke the silence, saying, "Take them all off."

She froze for a few moments, and she turned around. "Why?"

"I want to check your wounds," he said seriously. His eyes were clear of any desire. Uncomfortable with the idea of undressing in front of him, Shirley shook her head. "It's okay. I'll check them myself in my room."

Insistent, Zacharias declared, "I want to do it. What, are you still embarrassed?"

She paused briefly. Growing up surrounded by boys, she occasionally trained in just a sports bra. Fine, I'll do it. She took off her shirt, and only a black bra remained. Her voluptuous chest was revealed to his eyes. He was stunned. He knew she developed well, but they were bigger than he thought.

"Check the wounds closely, Mr. Flintstone," she said graciously.

Zacharias gulped, thinking, It'd be unbecoming of me if I get lewd thoughts right now. He narrowed his eyes and checked all the way from Shirley's chest to her back. He saw four bruises, and he pushed down on one gently.

"Ow," she gasped in pain. She could've held on if it were anyone else. Since it was him, she would show her weakness for some reason. She thought to herself, Am I trying to get his pity?

"Is your leg hurt too?" He frowned.

She insisted, "I can deal with the wounds on my leg myself."

"Take a hot bath. I'll rub some oil over the injuries," he said.

She nodded and went for a bath. She was caked in dust all over and looked grimy. After she went for a bath, he made a call. "I want the cops to give me the investigation report. With all the details."

"Yes, sir. I'll tell them about it," Freddie said. Concerned, he asked, "Is Miss Lloyd alright?"

"She is," Zacharias answered.

Freddie refrained from inquiring further, he didn't want Zacharias to misconstrue any romantic interest in Shirley.

Imogen knocked on Roy's door. She came into the room bearing an ice pack.

He was surprised to see her. "What is it, Imogen?"

"I got you an ice pack, captain. Let me help you," she said. She wanted to wheedle some intel out of him.

"Thanks, but I can deal with this myself," he said. She approached him and said, "Captain, I'm the only lady in the team besides Shirley. You should leave something like this to the ladies."

He couldn't refuse someone's offer to help. He sat back down on the couch. "Thanks, Imogen."

Imogen put the ice pack on Roy's bruise and pretended to nonchalantly ask, "Did Shirley tell you how she escaped while you guys were on your way back here?"

After her contribution this time, he wouldn't suspect her of being in cahoots with the criminals. He said honestly, "She said she knocked out one of the kidnapers and ran away."

"Good thing she got away, or the vice president would've been devastated." She sighed.

"Miss Lloyd and the vice president share a good relationship."

"That's an understatement. Shirley told me she likes the vice president. They're dating," Imogen said.