

CHAPTER THREE

ISAAC

“Mr Sizemore?”

Isaac squinted into the light from a lamp placed in the middle of the desk between him and the man addressing him. The light was blinding—intentionally so, since the lamp had been angled to shine directly into Isaac’s eyes. The rest of the room was layered in shadows.

A name floated up from the depths of Isaac’s memory: *Finch*.

Yes, he remembered now—the man addressing him was called Finch.

Why, he wondered, was it so hard to remember anything? Why did his every thought feel as if it were shrouded in thick, grey fog?

“Isaac,” Finch asked again, leaning forward and into the light. He had thinning brown hair, his narrow features twisted in a contemptuous scowl. “Answer the question.”

Yes, thought Isaac; he was beginning to remember Finch now. They had met before like this, hadn’t they? And they had known each other before as well, a long time ago.

Finch glanced at a sheet of smart-paper on the desk separating them, reading something scrawled there. “Lewis,” he asked, looking up and past Isaac’s shoulder with a frown, “how much did you give him?”

“Exactly what you told me to,” said a voice from behind Isaac.

Isaac felt his eyelids grow heavy, his head tipping forward on his shoulders.

“Isaac,” Finch barked. “Please stay awake.”

Isaac forced his eyes back open with reluctance. He tried to raise a hand to keep the light from shining in his eyes, but found he couldn’t. Glancing down, he saw that his wrists were bound with leather straps to the armrests of a wheelchair.

That seemed strange. Or did it? He had been strapped into this wheelchair before, hadn’t he? How many days had he been here... wherever *here* was?

He looked back up in time to see Finch eyeing him with a look akin to hunger. Finch leaned back again, his face fading to a barely perceptible silhouette behind the desk lamp.

“Our last talk together didn’t go so well, did it, Isaac?”

Gripped by inexplicable panic, Isaac twisted his wrists inside their restraints, desperate to get free. But the straps were tight—excessively so—and it hurt. A lot.

But the more he twisted them, and the more it hurt, the more clearly he seemed able to think.

“That’s not my name,” he said. His tongue felt thick and unwieldy in his mouth.

Finch made a clucking sound in the back of his throat. “We’re back to that, I see.”

“My name is...”

Isaac tried to focus. But his name *was* Isaac, wasn’t it?

Confusion flooded him.

Or was his name Dominic Fiori?

Suddenly he wasn’t sure what to think.

Rows of lights flickered behind Finch’s head, drawing Isaac’s attention. He squinted into the shadows and the lights resolved into a mobile medical monitor. It sat against the wall behind Finch. Graphs flickered and shifted on its screen.

Isaac could always think more clearly when it came to machines. They were, he had found, so much simpler than people. Judging by what he could see, the machine was measuring someone’s heart-rate

and skin conductivity. His, presumably; Finch must be using the monitor as a crude lie detector.

He twisted his wrists a little more, trying not to look obvious about it. The leather tore his skin and he bit back a sharp hiss of pain.

The clouds fogging his mind parted a little.

"Were you about to say Dominic Fiori?" Finch asked him.

Isaac nodded. "Yes."

"You have a driving licence in that name," Finch replied. "And a birth certificate. But they're fake. Your real name is Isaac Sizemore. You were one of Telop's star researchers until you disappeared."

Another twist of his hands inside their restraints, and Isaac stifled a grunt. He felt warm blood trickle down one wrist, invisible in the shadows.

Yes, he remembered Finch more clearly now; a jumped-up research assistant always waiting for a chance to get in tight with both Raphael Markov and his father, David Markov.

Waiting, Isaac had always suspected, for him to slip up.

Another memory came flooding back, from what must have been only days before. He'd blown a tyre on a lonely midnight road somewhere in the Scottish Highlands. Halfway through changing it, an unmarked van had pulled up next to him. Two men wearing plastic Halloween masks had got out and grabbed him before he could so much as stand up. One had pushed something into his shoulder and then—

And then he was here.

"I want," Finch continued, "to know why you left your job at Telop so abruptly all those years ago." He paused. "And why you did what you did."

"Did what?"

"I'm talking about proxy, Isaac. Stop playing games. We were colleagues once. Equals. I'd like us to be again."

"You were never my equal," Isaac snarled. "I remember you. You never had one original idea in your life."

Isaac could still only half-see Finch's expression in the shadows, but he nonetheless caught the glint of barely repressed fury on his interrogator's face.

"Raphael," Finch continued, his tone carefully neutral, "has invested heavily in the attempt to track you down. You did valuable work for him and his father, and then you threw it all away for nothing. He wants to know why." He glanced back down at his notes. "He also wants to know why you arranged to meet with some journalist."

Isaac's mind seemed much clearer now—and not just, he sensed, because of his self-inflicted wounds. He twisted his head around to try to see the orderly still standing behind him. Had the man given him a lower dosage of amobarbital than he had overheard Finch instructing him to?

Yes, Isaac decided. He must have. And if so...why?

In that same moment, and while Finch was distracted by whatever was on the sheet of smart paper, the orderly stepped forward until he was standing next to Isaac's wheelchair. When Isaac glanced up at him, the man gave Isaac the faintest conspiratorial nod.

Isaac stared back up at the orderly, dumbfounded, then felt an electric shock of realisation pass through him.

My God, he thought, quickly looking back down at the desk before Finch could see his expression: had Zero found a way to proxy with the orderly?

"Isaac?" Finch asked, clearly noticing something in his expression. "What is it?"

Isaac brought his chin back up, regarding Finch through narrowed eyes. "I would rather die," he said carefully, "than do anything for the Markov's ever again."

The muscles around Finch's jaw tensed. "That's unfortunate," he said. "Especially since we found it necessary to waylay Stacy on her way to meet the very journalist she'd arranged for you to talk to."

Isaac felt himself grow rigid. "What are you talking about?"

"Let's just say that an...associate of Raphael's intercepted Stacy. What happens to her next depends largely on your cooperation, Isaac."

"She..." Isaac swallowed with difficulty, his lips and throat bone dry. "Where is she?" He demanded, straining against the cuffs.

A greasy smile spread across Finch's lips. "I think that's enough for now. I'm sure the next time we meet you'll be much more open to talk-

ing." He glanced at the orderly. "Lewis, take him back to his room. Then I need you back here."

"Sir," said Lewis.

Isaac heard a door open behind him, then hands took hold of the wheelchair's handles, spinning it around before pushing it through the door.

"Zero?" Isaac whispered once they were out in the corridor.

"Not yet," the orderly warned him in a low voice. "I'll come and speak to you later."

Joy flooded Isaac's chest and his cheeks grew damp from his tears. "I'm so glad to see you," he said. "How did you—?"

"Later," Zero promised him.



LATER THAT NIGHT, Isaac woke to darkness and sensed he wasn't alone. He sat up on his cot and saw a silhouette standing at the open door of his room, a collection of keys hanging from one meaty hand.

The man stepped further into the room and Isaac saw it was indeed Lewis.

But was Zero still proxying with the orderly? It had been hours since their brief snatch of conversation following Finch's interrogation. Surely by now, Zero's proxy link with the man would have run out?

"Zero?" Isaac asked regardless, his throat dry and scratchy.

"It's me, Doctor Sizemore," the orderly whispered in response. "I need to get you out of here as soon as possible."

"Not yet," said Isaac, levering himself up from the cot. "Close the door so we aren't overheard. How did you even find me here?"

Zero did as he was told and shut the door before turning on the light. The room contained five other cots, all empty.

"After you disappeared," Zero explained, "I hacked into several security databases and tracked down the licence plate of the van that took you. The van is registered to this institute, the Abbey Rush Treatment Centre."

"And how did you manage to proxy with Lewis Finnegan?"

"I accessed this facility's security network and ran an analysis

going back six months that strongly suggested Mr Finnegan had been availing himself of medical supplies from secure storage cupboards and selling them for a profit," Zero explained. "I emailed him anonymously and told him I wouldn't go to the police so long as he agreed to proxy with me at certain prearranged times and places. He agreed. I contacted a local proxy dealer via the darknet, and had a proxy bead delivered to his home with instructions for when and how to inject it."

Isaac couldn't figure out whether to be appalled or amazed at Zero's ingenuity and ability to improvise a solution to his kidnapping. "That's...that's very good, Zero," he said with sincere appreciation. "Even so, it's important to me that no one is hurt as a result of our actions. Not even someone as unpleasant as Lewis Finnegan."

"Of course not," Zero replied. "I would never deliberately injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to—"

"You don't need to explain to me, of all people," Isaac reassured him. "Now tell me what you know about Stacy. Is she safe? What has Raphael done with her?"

"I know very little on that front, Doctor Sizemore. And I can't ask Doctor Finch too many questions without arousing his suspicions. But I believe an attempt to kidnap or otherwise harm Stacy was made shortly after she arrived in London. However, that's largely conjecture on my part."

"And the source of your conjecture?"

"An overheard phone conversation between Doctor Finch and someone I assume to have been Raphael Markov. From that I deduced they had paid someone to kidnap Stacy. The tone of the conversation and Finch's wording suggested this attempt hadn't gone to plan, but again I lack any details beyond that."

Isaac stepped over to the orderly and gripped him by the shoulders. "And where is she now?"

"I don't know, Doctor Sizemore. But I'm working on finding out. All of this only occurred in the last few hours."

Isaac stepped away from the orderly and pushed his hands across his scalp. "I can't allow them to harm her. There must be some way to find out where she is!"

"Whatever has happened to her, they can't use her to threaten or

control you if you're not here," Zero reminded him. "We need to go. I've disabled all the security cameras, but a new shift starts in fifteen minutes. We have to be gone before then to avoid risking detection."

Isaac regarded the beefy orderly with sudden curiosity. "You've changed," he said, remembering how Zero had fooled Finch into thinking he was Lewis. "I believe you've learned to lie."

"I am incapable of lying," Zero replied.

Isaac wanted to ask him if that was a lie too, but Zero was right about one thing—they were running out of time.

"There is one other detail of which you should be aware," Zero added.

"Which is?"

"After I removed you from Doctor Finch's office following your interrogation, I was asked to return there. Doctor Finch instructed me to fill a syringe with a lethal dosage of haloperidol and place it in a drawer in the room where he's been interrogating you. He didn't say why, but the only reasonable conclusion I can draw is that he's prepared to kill you if either he or Raphael aren't satisfied with whatever information you supply them with."

Isaac stared at him, stunned, then looked down at the over-sized pyjamas he had been given to wear. "I need clothes," he said. "I can't go wandering around outside looking like an escaped mental patient."

"I can get a change of clothes for you," said Zero. "But first you have to meet me outside."

At first Isaac thought he had misheard him. "You're standing right there, Zero. What do you mean meet—?"

Just then, a second orderly appeared in the doorway behind Zero. The blood nearly froze in Isaac's veins. This one was even more of a hulking brute than Lewis.

"There isn't time to explain," said the new arrival, his tone oddly similar to Zero's. Isaac gaped at the new arrival in mute astonishment. "The hospital rules say a patient has to be accompanied by two orderlies at all times outside hospital grounds."

The second orderly stepped past Lewis to take one of Isaac's arms. "I know this must seem confusing to you, Isaac," this second orderly

said, "but we have to hurry. I'm waiting in a van outside. I'll be able to tell you everything once we're under way."

"But..." Isaac's gaze darted between the two men. "I know who you are," he said to Lewis. He turned back to the second man. "But what do you have to do with any of this?"

"Doctor Sizemore," the second orderly said with seemingly infinite patience, "I'm Zero too. We both are."

"You're...?"

Isaac swallowed, unable to make sense of what they were telling him.

"Let's go," said the first Zero, taking Isaac's other arm. They escorted him down a corridor, then through a kitchen area and finally out through a back door.

Someone else Isaac had never seen before stood next to a van with the logo of a local pizza delivery service on the side.

"Hurry, Isaac," said this latest stranger, stepping around the back of the van and pulling the rear doors open. Lewis and the second orderly helped Isaac up and inside.

"Wait," said Isaac, turning to stare at the three men. "I don't understand." He looked imploringly at Lewis. "For God's sake, Zero, they can't all be you! It's impossible. It's...!"

"We're all me, Doctor," said Lewis, his tone not unsympathetic. "But right now we need to be on our way."

And with that, he swung the van doors shut.