

Mr. Edwards' Unraveled Life

Chapter 911

Rhea froze as Jace's sincere eyes stirred up emotions she'd tried to bury. She was drowning in debt, and Phillip's constant harassment had worn her down. But her pride wouldn't let her accept a handout.

"Thanks, Dean, but I can't," she said, lowering her gaze. "I want to earn it on my own."

Jace stepped closer and gently lifted her chin. "Look at me. This place is toxic—it's ruining your health and your reputation. I'm not giving charity. I'm your friend. This is just me helping you get through a rough patch."

Her throat tightened. "I've already leaned on you too much..."

"You're not a burden," he said softly. "I've seen your strength, your talent. I can't just stand by while you struggle. Take the help now—pay me back later."

She hesitated, then whispered, "The Seguin family's after me. If I want them off my back, I need... a few hundred thousand."

He nodded without flinching. "That's doable. I'll cover it. You need peace to live and work."

Tears welled up. "I don't even know how to thank you..."

Jace wiped her tears with gentle fingers. "Start by taking care of yourself. Stop running yourself into the ground."

His phone rang. His expression shifted as he glanced at the screen. "I need to take this."

He stepped away, speaking in a low voice. Rhea watched, uneasy. What kind of call could change his mood so quickly?

He returned shortly after. "Emergency at the hospital. I've got to go. Wait for me after your shift—I'll come get you."

"Okay," she said quickly.

After he left, her phone buzzed. A bank alert—Jace had transferred enough to clear all her debts. Her hands trembled. She was finally free.

Determined, she marched to the manager's office to resign. But as she reached the door, she froze. It was ajar—and inside, the manager was locked in a steamy kiss with a heavily made-up woman.

She cleared her throat.

The manager shoved the girl away, annoyed. "Rhea, why didn't you knock?"

"The door was open," she said stiffly. "I'm here to quit."

He straightened, sizing her up. "Quit? Why?"

"Personal reasons. I can't keep working here."

He leaned back, smug. "You know the contract. If you leave early, you pay damages. But..." His eyes roamed over her. "You're pretty. Work tonight, wrap things up, and I'll let it go. Deal?"

Her stomach churned. She knew he was scheming, but saying no might trap her. "Can you just keep my last paycheck and waive the penalty?"

He laughed. "Rules are rules. You signed a contract. There are clauses you missed. Break them, and you'll owe way more."

"Clauses?" she said, shocked. "I didn't see those!"

"Should've read the fine print," he shrugged. "Work tonight, or I'll sue."

Rage bubbled up, but she was stuck. "Fine," she muttered.

"Good girl," he sneered. "Don't mess it up."

She left, heart sinking. As she walked back to her station, she felt his eyes follow her. The other girl stood and strutted after her.

At the storage area, the girl blocked her way, smirking. "Think you're getting out that easy?"

Rhea tensed. "I said I'd finish the shift. What's your problem?"

"You ruined my moment with the manager. We were getting cozy until you barged in. You owe me."

Rhea's temper flared. "It wasn't on purpose. The door was open. I just wanted to quit."

"Too bad," the girl said, smug. "Fix it, or your night won't go well."

"Don't threaten me," Rhea warned. "I didn't do anything to you."

The girl crossed her arms. "This bar's my turf. Cross me, and you're out."

Rhea knew picking a fight here would only backfire, but she stood her ground. "What do you want?"

"Easy," the girl said, grinning. "Give me your commission from tonight."

"That's insane!" Rhea shot back. "I worked for that!"

"Then don't cry when I make your life hell."

A senior staff member passed by and sighed. "Just let it go, kid. She's got power here. You won't win."

Rhea's stomach twisted. She bit her lip, desperate for an out.

The girl suddenly changed her tone. "Fine. Keep your cash. Do me a favor. There's a private room that needs a server. I'm busy with the manager. You go."

Rhea hesitated. Something felt off. "Just serve drinks? Nothing else?"

The girl rolled her eyes. "Just drop off the booze. Relax."

Still wary, Rhea saw a chance to avoid more trouble. "Alright. I'll do it."

The girl smirked and stepped aside. Rhea pushed the cart toward the private room, telling herself she just had to get through one last night.

Back in the office, the girl walked in, hips swinging. "It's handled."

The manager grinned. "Good. Know why I picked that room? They asked for a virgin. Rhea's got that sweet, innocent look. Perfect match. If they're happy, we cash in."

The girl frowned. "What if she pushes back?"

He waved it off. "She's a nobody. If things go wrong, we blame her. Who's gonna believe a waitress?"

At the private room, Rhea forced a polite smile and opened the door. The air was thick with smoke and booze. Well-dressed men lounged, laughing.

One man leered. "Here comes the beauty they promised."

"I'm just here to serve drinks," Rhea said, setting bottles down, her voice steady even as her heart pounded.

Another man grabbed her wrist. "Stay. Have a drink."

She yanked her hand back. "I'm just here to do my job."

They laughed louder. "No one just serves here. Come on, sweetheart, you'll get a fat tip."

Her panic rose. "Please respect me. I'm working."

A burly man lunged toward her. "Don't act shy. You're ours tonight."

She backed into a wall, terror gripping her. Then the door burst open.

Jace stormed in, fury written all over his face. In two strides, he was in front of her, shielding her.

"What the hell's going on?" he barked.

The men froze. One slurred, "Mind your business, kid. This is between us and her."

"She *is* my business," Jace growled. "You're harassing my people."

The man sneered. "You know who I am? I run this city. Touch me, and you're finished."

Jace's smile was cold. "You're just a thug. Lay one hand on her again, and you'll regret it."

He pulled out his phone, made a quick call, and hung up. Moments later, the manager burst in, eyes wide with fear.

"Dean! It's just a misunderstanding!"

Jace glared. "This how you run your place? Letting customers assault your staff?"

The manager panicked. "I'll fix it! Right now!" He turned to the men. "Leave. Now."

They realized they were up against someone powerful and started to file out. But Jace stopped them.

"Apologize to her. All of you."

Chapter 912

The men muttered half-hearted apologies before hurrying out, clearly humiliated. Jace watched them go, jaw tight with anger.

"You okay?" he asked Rhea.

She nodded faintly. "Yeah. Thanks, Dean."

"Let's get out of here," he said, gently leading her away from the bar's chaos.

In the parking lot, he opened the car door for her, then got behind the wheel.

"I thought you had an emergency at the hospital?" she asked as she buckled up.

"I did. But something didn't sit right with me. I wrapped it up fast and came back. Good thing I did."

Warmth and fear stirred in her chest. "If you hadn't shown up... I don't even want to think about what could've happened."

He clenched his jaw. "You don't belong in a place like that. This won't happen again."

"I needed the money," she said quietly. "I thought working hard would fix everything... but it just made things worse."

He patted her shoulder. "I'll deal with the Seguin family. Your debt's covered. Go back to the hospital—focus on your future."

Her eyes shimmered. "Why are you so good to me? I'll never be able to repay you."

He glanced over. "Repay me by doing what you're good at—healing people. You've got talent, Rhea. Don't waste it."

She nodded firmly. "I'll go back. I promise I won't let you down."

"I know you won't," he said, a small smile tugging at his lips.

The rest of the ride was quiet. When they reached her place, he said, "Get some rest. I'll handle whatever fallout comes from the bar."

"Thanks, Dean," she whispered as she got out.

She watched his car disappear into the night, her heart full of mixed emotions—grief, relief, and hope.

At home, she turned the shower to scorching hot and scrubbed her skin until it hurt, trying to wash away the night's filth. Even clean, the memory lingered.

She collapsed on her bed, exhausted, and texted him: *Thanks for tonight. I'll never forget it.*

He replied: *Glad you're home. Rest. See you at the hospital.*

His words comforted her. She curled up and tried to sleep, but nightmares came—mocking faces, cruel laughter. Only Jace's steady presence pulled her through.

Chapter 913

The men muttered reluctant apologies, their egos bruised. Jace watched them leave, disgust flickering in his eyes.

"You okay?" he asked, turning to Rhea.

She nodded, her voice barely a whisper. "Yeah. Thanks, Dean."

"Come on," he said gently. "You're done here."

She followed him through the bar's chaotic noise, which faded behind them like a bad dream. Outside in the parking lot, he opened the car door for her before sliding into the driver's seat.

"Why'd you come back?" she asked, buckling up. "You said you had a hospital emergency."

Jace kept his eyes on the road. "I was worried. Something felt off. I wrapped things up and came back. Good thing I did—you weren't safe."

Warmth bloomed in her chest, laced with lingering fear. "If you hadn't shown up, I... I don't know what would've happened. They wouldn't listen."

His jaw tightened, pain flashing in his eyes. "You don't belong in a place like that. It's a mess. But this won't happen again."

"I needed the money," she admitted, her voice low. "To shake off the Seguin family. I thought working hard would fix it, but it only dragged me into more trouble."

He rested a reassuring hand on her shoulder. "Let me deal with the Seguins. The money's covered. Just go back to the hospital—focus on what you're good at."

Her eyes shimmered. "Why are you being so good to me? I don't know how I'll ever repay you."

He glanced at her, his gaze steady. "Repay me by showing up at the hospital. You have a gift. Don't waste it."

She nodded, her resolve solidifying. "I'll go back. I won't let you down."

A faint smile tugged at his lips. "I know you won't."

The drive was quiet. Her mind swirled with confusion and gratitude, his kindness both comforting and overwhelming. When they reached her place, he turned to her.

"Get some rest. I'll deal with the bar fallout. Don't worry."

"Thanks, Dean," she said, stepping out. She watched his car disappear into the night, her heart heavy yet hopeful.

At home, she cranked the shower to scalding, scrubbing her skin raw in a desperate attempt to erase the men's touch. But even clean, the violation lingered. She sat on her bed, exhausted and sleepless, then typed out a text: *Thanks for tonight. I'll never forget it.*

His reply was simple: *Glad you're home. Rest. See you at the hospital.*

The message calmed her. She curled up under the covers, willing sleep to come. Nightmares stalked her—leering faces, mocking laughter—but Jace's steady presence in her mind pulled her out. She woke gasping, drenched in sweat, but the morning light brought a sliver of peace.

After a quick breakfast, she dressed carefully and made her way to the hospital, nerves tangled with excitement. Outside Jace's office, raised voices halted her steps. She knocked.

"Come in," Jace called.

Inside, a furious man stood before him. Jace nodded toward a chair for Rhea, then turned back to the man. "My decision's final. Take it up with the higher-ups if you want—but here, we follow the rules."

The man stormed out, slamming the door behind him.

Jace rubbed his temples and gave her a tired smile. "Sorry you had to see that. Just hospital politics. Don't let it get to you."

Chapter 914

"Starting today, you're officially my assistant again," Jace said.

Rhea's eyes widened. "Really? I'll do my best."

He stood and patted her shoulder. "Catch up on the recent files and projects. If you have questions, ask. I trust you."

She hesitated. "But... what about your current assistant? And the others? You're admired around here. This'll make me a target."

Jace's expression darkened. "What's your point?"

"I just want peace after everything with the Seguins," she murmured. "I don't want more enemies."

"You need money, don't you?" he asked, his tone sharpening.

"Yes," she admitted. The Seguins had drained her—financially, emotionally. She had nothing left.

"Then don't complain," he said coolly. "Being my assistant is just a title. I need someone with clinical skill and judgment for bigger things."

"But—"

"No buts," he interrupted, voice firm.

She fell silent, anxiety swirling in her chest. "Then make it official. Announce it publicly," she said. "I don't want rumors."

He scoffed. "You think I can't pick my own staff?"

"I didn't mean it like that," she said quickly. "I just..."

"Enough," he said, already turning away. "I'll handle it."

Rhea left, unease curling around her. Three days later, Jace's official announcement went out—naming her his assistant.

As expected, the hospital turned against her. That afternoon, an intern cornered her in the hallway.

"Didn't peg you for such a climber, Dr. Neufeld," Londyn Chartrand sneered. "Already the dean's assistant? Spent all my money yet?"

Rhea flushed, guilt tugging at her insides. "I did what you asked, but the dean caught on. The money..."

"I don't want it back," Londyn hissed. "I want triple. Or your career's done."

Panic surged. "Don't do this," Rhea begged. "I'll keep paying. The WhatsApp's gone, but I can drug him again or find another way—"

Londyn laughed bitterly. "You think he's that easy to fool? Jace isn't stupid, Rhea."

Rhea wilted under the weight of her mistake. It had snowballed into something monstrous.

Londyn slung an arm around her, mockingly friendly. "You're so close to him now. So many chances to cozy up."

She pinched Rhea's cheek, her smile vicious. "This face of yours..."

Rhea stood frozen, humiliated and powerless.

"Relax. I'm not a monster," Londyn said, her tone dripping sarcasm. "I'm Londyn Chartrand. Remember it."

“Got it,” Rhea muttered.

Londyn’s smile turned cruel. “Jace must see something in you. Your cowardice, maybe?”

The words stung.

“I don’t know why he picked me,” Rhea said quietly. “I’ll do what you want... but I won’t be your puppet forever.”

Londyn’s eyes narrowed. “You’re negotiating? You’ve got no leverage.”

Rhea stepped back, heart racing. “Maybe not. But I’ll write you an IOU—two hundred thousand. That’s my final offer. Don’t threaten me. If you want Jace, go for him yourself. Your schemes are illegal. I’m done.”

She turned to leave, bracing for retaliation—but Londyn moved to block her path.

Chapter 915

Londyn grabbed Rhea’s arm, her nails digging in. “You think you can buy me off? I don’t want your money,” she spat. “Do what I say—or I’ll ruin you.”

Fear flared in Rhea’s chest, but the thought of living under Londyn’s thumb forever was worse.

She met Londyn’s glare head-on. “Then ruin me. But pay me first. Or we both go down. My life’s already a wreck—but you? You clawed your way into this hospital. Ready to lose it all?”

Londyn stilled. She’d worked hard to be here—long nights, difficult rotations, fake smiles. The thought of losing it burned. Still, pride kept her sneering.

“Are you threatening me?”

“I’m not,” Rhea said. “But I’m on a task for Jace. If I’m late and things go wrong, guess who’ll take the fall first?”

She turned and walked off, her heart pounding. Londyn didn’t follow. Her face was tight with fury—Rhea’s defiance had struck a nerve.

Rhea reached Jace’s office, forcing a polite smile at his assistant, who barely acknowledged her. She understood. Her presence was a disruption.

Inside, Jace looked up. “You look... lighter. Handled things?”

“Not completely,” she said, “but I’m standing straighter today. That’s enough for now.”

“Who was it?”

“Londyn.”

Jace’s jaw tightened. He remembered Londyn was Cody’s cousin, brought in as a favor to Norah. He’d let her antics slide—until now.

“Did you pay her back? What did she say?”

“I offered a deal. Told her the cost of pushing me further.”

“Wish you were that firm with the Seguins,” he muttered.

Her chest ached. The Seguin family had bled her dry—money, time, spirit. Teresa’s death and Phillip’s disability left her shackled. “It’s not always about strength,” she said quietly. “Some fights aren’t worth it.”

Jace changed the subject. “Pack up. We’re heading to another city for a hospital expansion.”

“But the patient’s surgery—”

“Cody will handle it.”

She nodded, trusting him. She grabbed her overnight bag—always kept in the office—and followed him out.

Later, a text lit up her phone.
Obey me, or I’ll destroy you. —Londyn.

Rhea almost ignored it, then typed back:
Keep texting me, and I’ll go to the police.

Jace glanced at her frown. “Seguin trouble again?”

“No,” she said, forcing a smile. “Londyn. I handled it.”

“Good. I don’t want my assistant distracted by personal drama. Focus on the work ahead.”

“Understood,” she said.

Jace had arranged everything—hotel, itinerary. Their rooms were across from each other.

“Rest tonight,” he said. “Business starts tomorrow. Don’t cause trouble.”

“I won’t,” she promised.

But trouble didn’t wait. Phillip’s texts kept coming—vile, demanding. His latest:
Give me a child, and you’re free from us forever.
Unknown numbers echoed the message, a chorus of threats.

Rhea's past wasn't done with her yet.

Chapter 916

Rhea's stomach churned as Phillip's vile messages piled up—his threats, his twisted demands. Enough was enough.

She called the police, voice shaking but steady, laying out years of harassment. She read Phillip's latest text aloud, including his sickening proposal. The officer on the line didn't hesitate.

"We'll act immediately, Dr. Neufeld. You'll be protected."

Minutes later, sirens howled through the city. Squad cars swarmed Phillip's neighborhood, their flashing lights slicing through the dusk.

Inside, Phillip was caught off guard. "What the hell is this?" he barked as officers stormed in.

"You're under investigation for criminal harassment," an officer stated firmly. "You need to come with us."

"I didn't do anything!" Phillip shouted, flailing as they cuffed him.

At the station, Seguin's mother arrived in a panic. Her hair was disheveled, her eyes wild. "Please, there's been a mistake! My son's mentally ill—he didn't mean it!"

"Then show us his medical records," an officer replied calmly.

"I... I left them at home," she stammered.

Seeing an opening, Phillip launched into chaos. He slammed chairs, flung papers, ranted nonsense. Officers ducked debris as he hurled a trash can, garbage spilling everywhere.

"Calm down!" they yelled. "You'll be restrained!"

Phillip didn't listen. He elbowed one officer, who grunted but held firm. Panic rippled through the precinct as bystanders backed away. Seguin's mother screamed, "Phillip, please!"

The police chief arrived, voice booming. "That's enough!"

Phillip froze. In seconds, the chief twisted his arm, pinning him to the floor. Gasping for air, Phillip mumbled incoherently, his rage drained.

Officers moved in to restore order. Seguin's mother sobbed in a corner. "You don't understand! Rhea ruined our lives! She killed my daughter, crippled my other son! Phillip's broken because of her!"

"We'll investigate all claims," one officer said. "But his harassment of Dr. Neufeld is documented."

"You're blind!" she wailed. "Rhea's framing us!"

The officer remained calm. "Everyone's equal under the law. Keep interfering, and you'll be charged too."

She backed off, her hysteria giving way to bitter silence.

Chapter 917

In a holding room, Phillip played the victim.

"I had an episode," he murmured. "I'm mentally ill. I couldn't control it."

The officer watching him didn't flinch. "Save it. That excuse won't work here."

Meanwhile, Rhea received a call from the station. They relayed Seguin's mother's accusations.

"She's lying," Rhea said, voice steady. "They've blackmailed me for years, blamed me for every misfortune in their family. I've had enough."

"We'll verify everything," the officer said. "Avoid contact with them. We'll handle this by the book."

"I have years of payment records—transfers, messages. I want to file a formal complaint."

"Bring the evidence," he replied. "We'll get the process started."

At the station, Seguin's mother faced tough questions.

"Your story contradicts the facts," an officer told her bluntly. "False accusations carry consequences. Cooperate, or we escalate."

Her face drained of color, but her eyes still burned with resentment.

Back in her apartment, Rhea sat in silence, the Seguin family's torment looping through her mind. The capital was no longer safe—no matter what she did, they'd find a way to pull her back in.

She picked up the phone and called Jace.

"Dean," she said, her voice cracking. "I can't stay here anymore. The Seguin family won't stop. Can you help me find work elsewhere? I need to disappear."

He was silent for a beat, then spoke with quiet certainty. “I understand. I’ll find something. You deserve a clean break.”

Tears spilled down her cheeks. “I thought you’d tell me to fight back. I’m so tired of fighting.”

“I don’t want you to suffer,” he said. “File the police report. I’ll take care of the rest.”

That night, Jace reached out to a colleague he trusted. “Lemire,” he said over the phone, “I’ve got a talented doctor—Rhea Neufeld. Experienced, capable, and she needs a new start.”

Dean Lemire didn’t hesitate. “We’re expanding a department in City A. Let’s work something out.”

The next morning, Rhea woke early and looked out at the city she was preparing to leave. For the first time in years, it didn’t feel like it owned her.

Chapter 918

Rhea packed slowly, folding clothes with care, tucking away memories she didn’t want to carry with her. She zipped the suitcase and straightened up just as the doorbell rang.

Jace stood on the other side.

“Ready?” he asked gently.

“Almost,” she said with a small nod. “Thank you, Dean.”

He took the suitcase without a word and led her downstairs. The air outside was cool, the streets unfamiliar now—like they belonged to someone else.

In the car, silence settled between them—not heavy, just full.

“Dean,” she said softly, “I don’t know how to thank you for all this.”

“No need,” he replied, eyes on the road. “City A’s a good place. Strong hospital culture. Just keep doing what you’re good at.”

“I will,” she promised.

The drive passed quickly. In City A, Jace pulled up to a small apartment complex in a quiet, leafy neighborhood. He carried her bags inside, revealing a clean, fully furnished space with cozy touches.

Rhea’s eyes widened. “This is perfect...”

“Rest,” Jace said, glancing around. “Tomorrow, I’ll go with you to the hospital. Help you get oriented.”

She blinked. “You’re coming? Won’t that take time from your work in the capital?”

“I’ve been invited here for a complex surgery,” he said. “Just so happens to line up with your start.”

Gratitude welled up. “You’ve thought of everything. I can’t repay you.”

“You don’t have to.”

He checked the time. “I’ll head back tonight. Need to wrap up some deals.”

Before he could leave, she blurted, “Stay for dinner? Let me cook for you. A small thank-you.”

He hesitated, then saw the look in her eyes. “Alright. Thanks.”

Her smile lit up the room. She threw on a coat and dashed to the nearby market, weaving through the crowd. She picked out fresh sea bass, bright vegetables, mushrooms, potatoes, and fragrant herbs.

Back home, she slipped into an apron and started prepping.

Jace peeked into the kitchen. “Need help?”

She looked up, surprised. “You cook?”

“A little,” he said, rolling up his sleeves. “Can’t let you do all the work.”

Warmth bloomed in her chest. “Alright—cut the veggies?”

He sliced potatoes with surprising ease. “You’re good with a knife,” she said, impressed.

“Learned abroad,” he said casually. “Had to cook for myself a lot.”

They worked side by side—Rhea marinated the sea bass and seared it to perfection, while Jace stir-fried mushrooms and greens, then crisped the potatoes. Soon, a modest feast filled the table.

“We make a good team,” she said, smiling as they sat down.

“Teamwork,” he said, his voice soft.

They ate in comfortable silence, the city’s noise forgotten. After dinner, she waved him off from helping. “You’ve done enough. Let me clean up.”

He sank into the couch, watching her. The quiet of the apartment, the warmth in her movements—it all felt strangely like peace.

And peace, for both of them, had been in short supply for far too long.

Chapter 919

A sharp hiss escaped Rhea as she yanked her hand back from the pot, the dish scalding her fingers. She quickly set it down and shook out her hand, wincing.

“What happened?” Jace was by her side in a heartbeat, eyes narrowing. “Did you burn yourself?”

“It’s nothing,” she said quickly, tucking her hand away. “I’ll rinse it off.”

“Let me see.” His voice left no room for argument.

Reluctantly, she showed him her reddened fingers. His expression darkened, a cold edge slipping into his usually composed demeanor.

“Sorry,” she mumbled. “I thought it wasn’t that bad.”

He silently guided her hand under the cold water. “You’re a doctor. You should know better than to ignore injuries.”

His words stung a little, but the concern in his voice made her chest tighten. She glanced at him and caught his gaze just as he looked her way. Embarrassed, she pulled her hand back. “Thanks,” she said quickly and hurried into the living room with the dish, her heart racing.

Jace lingered in the kitchen, staring at his hands. He could still feel the warmth of hers. That unfamiliar, weightless ache settled in his chest again. He rinsed his fingers under the tap, but the heat wasn’t in his skin—it was deeper, harder to wash away.

He joined her at the table, face unreadable. Rhea, thinking he was upset, offered a small olive branch. “Sorry again. I won’t hide things like that anymore. Try this?”

He took a bite of the sour-spicy potato shreds and paused. They tasted like something they’d made together once. His mood softened. “It’s good. Try some.”

Without thinking, he picked up a bite with his chopsticks and held it out to her.

They both froze. The gesture was too familiar—too intimate.

Jace looked away, and Rhea shoved a mouthful of rice into her mouth to hide her fluster. They ate in silence, pretending the moment hadn’t happened.

The next morning, Rhea reported to City A’s hospital. Jace accompanied her, personally introducing her to Dean Lemire.

"You came all the way here yourself?" the dean joked. "You must think very highly of her."

"She's exceptional," Jace said, voice serious. "Skilled, experienced, and held back by circumstance. Give her the support she deserves."

Dean Lemire chuckled, clearly charmed. Rhea's position was quickly confirmed, but Jace's phrasing—*junior*—stung. Was that all she was to him? Just a mentee?

Jace left soon after, headed back to the capital. As they said goodbye, Rhea hesitated.

"Can I contact you later?" she blurted. "For work stuff. If I run into any issues..."

"You can," he said, gesturing to his phone. "Anytime."

Her smile bloomed as she watched him go.

Dean Lemire assigned her to the duty room, explaining that the surgical roster was full. "Start with general patients. Research projects will open up later."

"I understand," she said, grateful for even that.

Her new office was bare. She placed her puppy-themed mug on the desk, opened a window, and murmured to herself, "There's a flower shop nearby. I'll go pick up something green."

Chapter 920

On her first day, Rhea set up her office and waited. No patients came. Still, she remained upbeat—after all, it was only day one.

Just as she was packing up, a nurse burst in.

"Dr. Neufeld, we've got a critical burn case. Can you help?"

"I'm not a surgeon," Rhea hesitated. "I don't handle grafting."

"She's a child," the nurse pleaded. "The others are tied up. Please—there's no one else."

Rhea followed the nurse, heart thudding. A mother was sobbing in the hallway, clutching her burned daughter.

"Please save her!" the mother wailed.

Rhea examined the burns. They were severe—way beyond her comfort zone.

"I need a specialist," she said. "I'll find one."

"You're a doctor!" the mother cried. "You'll just watch her die?"

The nurse leaned in, whispering, “By the time you find someone, she might not make it.”

Rhea’s pulse pounded. She inhaled deeply, then nodded. “Prep the OR. I’ll do it.”

As she scrubbed in, she called Jace. He answered immediately.

“Switch to video,” he said without hesitation. “I’ll guide you.”

His calm voice was an anchor in the chaos. With his precise instructions, she completed the grafting. The girl stabilized.

The mother cried again—but this time in relief. “Thank you. Thank you so much.”

“I was just doing my job,” Rhea said, brushing away the praise.

The next day, a banner appeared at the hospital entrance: **Healing the World**. Whispers spread like wildfire.

“Solo surgery on day one?” her colleagues teased at lunch. “You’re already a legend.”

“Someone walked me through it,” she muttered, not mentioning Jace.

Her reputation grew quickly. From sitting idle, she was now booked back-to-back, collapsing into bed each night, physically spent but quietly fulfilled.

This hospital was different. It didn’t run on power plays or backstabbing. When tough patients lashed out, staff had her back. It was unfamiliar—and comforting.

A week later, she glanced at her windowsill. Still bare.

“I forgot the flowers!” she groaned.

After work, she visited a nearby flower shop. She picked out lily of the valley for herself—graceful, hopeful. Then she hesitated in front of a display.

The young shopkeeper smiled. “Gift for someone?”

“He’s... stern, but kind,” Rhea said softly. “Sharp-tongued, but always responsible.”

Her unguarded smile gave her away. The shopkeeper grinned. “Irises. Blue and white. Elegant and a little aloof. Just like him.”

Rhea laughed. “Perfect. Can you deliver across the city?”

“Leave the address,” the shopkeeper said. “He’ll have them tomorrow.”

Rhea paid and left, hugging her bouquet of lilies. Her heart felt light—full of gratitude... and something more she didn't dare name.