

Mr. Edwards' Unraveled Life

Chapter 931

Rhea stared at the email, confused. Why would the association reach out to her? The invitation felt off—too sudden, too calculated. Was this about her... or a subtle jab at Jace?

Harlow noticed her expression. "You're not excited? This is huge! New doctors like us don't get summoned by the association."

"It could open so many doors," she added, eyes bright.

Rhea shook her head. "I'm not interested."

Harlow blinked. "What about your mentor? Won't this affect your chances—?"

"I'll figure it out," Rhea cut in. "Thanks, but I don't need convincing. I don't trust them, and I'm not joining."

Her tone brooked no argument. Harlow stepped back, worried but respectful. The concern in her eyes touched Rhea more than she expected—but it didn't ease the knot in her chest.

Jace's return had been delayed. He'd be leaving for the capital tomorrow, and Rhea planned to visit him before then. She needed to talk—about the email, about everything. She trusted his judgment. But when she arrived, the nanny met her at the door with a worried look.

"Dr. Jace's sick."

Rhea froze. "What? How? He was fine yesterday."

The words didn't register. Jace—sick? He seemed untouchable. Unshakable.

"Acute gastroenteritis with a fever," the nanny explained. "Diagnosed this morning. The family doctor just left. He's resting upstairs."

Rhea's stomach sank. She had never seen Jace as vulnerable—not really. "Did he eat something bad?"

"Probably my French risotto last night," the nanny fretted. "The sausage... I shouldn't have. His stomach's sensitive—it's my fault."

"I'm going up," Rhea said, already halfway up the stairs.

"Wait, miss—!" the nanny called, but Rhea didn't stop.

She burst into his room, expecting to find him bedridden. Instead, he sat at a table, glasses on, reading. Calm, composed—until he coughed, face flushed faintly with fever.

Rhea snatched the book from his hands. “You’re sick. Stop reading!”

Jace looked up, surprised. “Why are you here?”

“I came to talk, but that can wait. You’ve got gastroenteritis and a fever, and you’re ignoring your doctor’s orders?”

He coughed again. “There’s nothing else to do.”

“Rest,” she snapped. “That’s what you do. I’m confiscating this. Go lie down.”

He blinked at her—no one else would’ve dared speak to him like that. But he didn’t argue. “You said you had something to discuss?”

Rhea hesitated. “The association emailed me. They want to meet.”

She watched his face darken, just as she’d expected. “What do you want to do?” he asked, voice flat.

“I’m not going,” she said quickly. “I swear!”

Jace’s lips twitched, nearly a smile. “Why not? The association’s powerful. They have a lot to offer.”

He didn’t care for them, but he knew what they could do for someone like her—resources, connections, mentors. Anyone would jump at the chance.

“I won’t go,” she said again, firm.

“For me?” he asked, brow raised.

His heart stirred at the thought, but it worried him too.

“If that’s the reason, don’t. I want your decisions to be yours, not mine.”

“It *is* my decision,” Rhea said, meeting his gaze. “I mean it.”

Jace looked away, trying to tamp down the emotions rising in his chest. “You’re prepping for grad school?”

“Yeah,” she said. “Studying hard.”

“Thought about a mentor?”

She fell silent. She might be bold with patients, confident with friends—but she had no mentor, no powerful connections. She was on her own.

Chapter 932

Rhea looked away. “I’ll figure something out.”

Jace saw right through her. “I figured you hadn’t thought that far. I’ve got you covered—I’ll write your recommendation letter.”

Her eyes widened. “Seriously?”

She’d hoped to ask him but held back. He’d already done so much.

“It’s too much trouble,” she murmured.

“You call me Dean, don’t you?” Jace said. “We’re friends. A letter’s nothing.”

Just like that, the weight on her chest lifted. With Jace backing her, she finally felt like grad school was within reach.

She stayed to take care of him, gently pushing the nanny aside when she offered help.

“You’re cooking?” the nanny asked, doubtful. “His stomach’s a mess—you have to be careful.”

Rhea smiled, tying on an apron. “Don’t worry. I know what I’m doing.”

Her voice was casual, but the truth was harder: she’d spent years cooking for herself. Survival had taught her everything.

“You shouldn’t have to do this,” the nanny murmured. “Young lady like you—this isn’t your job.”

“I’m used to it,” Rhea said, not unkindly.

The nanny stepped back, watching with growing respect as Rhea prepared porridge with practiced hands. She heated a bit of lard—just enough for flavor—and paired it with light, crisp sides to soothe Jace’s stomach.

When he came downstairs, still pale but alert, the smell drew him in. He hadn’t planned to eat, but after two spoonfuls, he couldn’t stop. He finished two bowls.

“Well done,” he said, wiping his mouth.

“All Miss Neufeld,” the nanny said proudly. “I’m his nutritionist, but I didn’t think of this. Lucky she’s here.”

Rhea blushed. “It’s just something I made for myself when I had no appetite. Figured I’d try it on you.”

The nanny praised her modesty, but Jace stayed quiet, his gaze lingering on the table. This wasn’t about the food. It was the care behind it. His chest warmed.

“Thank you,” he said softly.

“It’s nothing,” she replied, brushing it off. She didn’t think she’d done much—nothing close to what he’d done for her.

But Jace didn’t see it that way. He was determined to help her succeed.

Two days later, as he prepared to return to the capital, he handed her a notebook.

“My notes. Everything I’ve gathered over the years. Use them.”

He said it casually, but Rhea felt the weight of it immediately.

She tried to hand it back. “I can’t accept this—”

“You’re serious about grad school, right? Then keep it. I’m not there to guide you, but this is the next best thing.”

Her hands trembled slightly as she clutched it. “I won’t let you down.”

After seeing him off, she threw herself into studying, diving deep into the notebook’s detailed cases, insights, and handwritten thoughts.

She felt ready.

Then, days before the exam, Harlow burst into her room, breathless.

“Rhea—someone’s here for you!”

“What? A patient?”

“No.” Harlow gasped for breath. “It’s Iker. He says Mr. Lussier wants to meet you.”

The name sent a chill down Rhea’s spine.

Chapter 933

Rhea took a few deep breaths before facing Iker.

He stood in her office, staring idly at the potted red carnations on her windowsill.

“Those are mine,” she warned. “Don’t knock them over.”

Too late. *Crash*. The pot hit the floor, shattering.

Rhea flinched. Relief that it hadn’t fallen out the window vanished in a flash of anger. “What’s your problem, Dr. Iker?”

He slipped his hands into his pockets, all faux innocence. “Accident. Want me to pay for it? Name your price.”

Her jaw clenched. She suddenly understood why Jace despised him. “Forget it. Let’s get to the point.”

“No need to dance around it,” Iker said, pulling out a hand, his black earring catching the light. “My teacher wants to meet you.”

Rhea narrowed her eyes. “Why?”

“No reason,” he said with a smirk. “He just wants to meet the genius who pulled off a miracle surgery. You’re famous now.”

“I’m flattered,” she said coolly. “But I’m just a junior doctor. I don’t have grand ambitions, and I’m not interested in joining the association. Tell Mr. Lussier thanks, but no thanks.”

Polite, but firm.

Iker chuckled, then leaned closer. “Heard you’re applying to grad school.”

Her stomach turned cold.

“Too old for grade-school bullying, don’t you think?” she shot back. “Is this supposed to be a threat?”

He shrugged. “No threats. Just facts.”

The implication was clear. One word from the association, and her future could vanish.

“Why me?” she asked, forcing her voice steady.

“You’ve got talent,” Iker said, twisting his earring. “My teacher admires ambition.”

Rhea rolled her eyes. “Wait outside.”

She shed her white coat, face expressionless. Gone was the bright, open smile Iker had once seen her flash at Jace. What remained was ice.

In the car, Iker glanced at her through the rearview mirror. “No smile? That scowl’s not helping your image.”

“I’m a doctor, not an escort,” she snapped. “Want a smile? Go find one at a bar.”

He fell silent, stunned. She was the only one—besides Jace—who’d ever shut him down that completely.

The association’s headquarters loomed like a luxury club—black marble tiles, quiet opulence. The receptionist greeted Iker like royalty. “Welcome back, Dr. Iker.”

Rhea shifted uncomfortably as he lingered to flirt.

“Where’s Mr. Lussier?” she asked, cutting in.

The receptionist blinked. Iker raised a brow, amused.

“In a hurry?”

Her glare shut him up.

He led her to a private room where a man in a Zhongshan suit sat with a cane, his graying hair and sharp gaze betraying nothing.

“Teacher,” Iker said with rare reverence.

The man looked past him, straight at Rhea. “You’re Jace’s assistant?”

Rhea bowed slightly. “Rhea, greeting Mr. Lussier.”

He studied her in silence before finally sipping his tea. “You’ve got some of Jace’s spine.”

Chapter 934

Rhea didn’t take it as a compliment. With Mr. Lussier’s history with Jace, it felt more like a jab.

She swallowed her unease. “Why did you summon me, Mr. Lussier? I’ve got work waiting at the hospital, so let’s keep this quick.”

His lips curved, half-amused. “You love your job, don’t you?”

“Very much,” she said, nails digging crescents into her palms. She held her composure—without Jace, she couldn’t afford to slip.

Mr. Lussier studied her, then frowned slightly. “You look... familiar somehow.”

Rhea blinked, caught off guard. Before she could respond, he waved it off. “Never mind. Let’s get to it. Your surgery was impressive. Jace trained you well. The association doesn’t overlook talent—especially not someone your age.”

There it was.

Rhea’s shoulders eased slightly. So, it was a recruitment pitch.

“Thank you for the recognition, Mr. Lussier,” she began.

His eyes narrowed, sensing the “but” before she even said it.

“But I’m not interested in joining,” she continued evenly. “I already have meaningful work. I’m not chasing power or status—I just want to treat patients.”

She couldn’t stomach the association’s cliques and backroom deals. Doctors were supposed to heal, not maneuver.

Mr. Lussier snorted. “You sound just like Jace. His protégé, through and through.”

Rhea froze. *Jace said that too?*

Mr. Lussier leaned forward, gaze pressing down on her. “Joining us would fast-track everything—more resources, better opportunities. Think how many lives you could save.”

She met his eyes without blinking. “No, thank you.”

His expression darkened. The legs of his chair scraped against the marble as he stood abruptly. “Refuse us, and you’re finished. No recommendation letter. No thesis approval. No future.”

Her heart clenched, but she didn’t flinch. “My thesis is still a ways off. And I’m not worried about a recommendation—someone’s already promised me one.” She smiled, each word deliberate.

She left the building with that same smile, her head high.

Iker escorted her out. At the entrance, the wind ruffled his hair. “Stupid,” he muttered.

Rhea heard him, but didn’t stop. Jace had gone against the powerful too. She wasn’t alone.

Back at the hospital, Harlow was waiting to pounce. “Well? Tell me everything.”

Rhea glossed over the worst of it but gave enough to stun her friend.

“You *refused* them? Girl, you’re insane—in the best way!”

Rhea swatted away Harlow's enthusiastic thumbs-up. "Stop. I was terrified."

She collapsed into her chair, arms spread wide. "I'm no hero. My legs were jelly the whole time."

Harlow laughed. "You walked in like a queen! Where's that fire now?"

"More like a wet noodle," Rhea groaned, half-laughing. She still had a long way to go to become the woman she wanted to be.

That evening, Jace called just as she finished her shift, like he had a sixth sense.

"How was work?"

Rhea tidied her desk, phone tucked against her shoulder. "Same old. You know how it is—never-ending patients."

With so few surgeons on call, she was constantly yanked into the OR, juggling her internal medicine work like a spinning top.

A low chuckle echoed through the line. She froze.

"Who was that?"

"It's me," Jace said, amused.

Her cheeks flushed as she pictured his smile. Flustered, she blurted, "Oh—uh—I went to the association today. Mr. Lussier invited me to join. I said no."

On his end, Jace stiffened. A colleague passing by greeted him—"Dean"—but he didn't respond.

"What happened after?"

"He threw some threats, but I brushed them off," she said breezily.

She wasn't worried. Jace had promised a recommendation letter, and the association couldn't touch her. This was a lawful society, right?

Jace's brows knotted. Her casual tone screamed naivety. "They're not that simple. By the way, your family situation's mostly resolved. Want to transfer back?"

Chapter 935

Rhea paused. Then shook her head. "No, I'll stay."

Jace sounded surprised. "Why?"

“Running back and forth isn’t a solution,” she said. “I shouldn’t have left in the first place. What can they really do? I’m not scared—just annoyed.”

Raised by the Seguin family, she knew how to dodge trouble. But after everything, she was tired of running. If trouble came again, she’d face it head-on.

When he didn’t respond, she faltered. “Did I let you down?”

“No,” Jace said, chuckling softly. It was a warm sound, like a breeze in spring. “I’m glad you feel that way.”

The transfer conversation ended there.

Soon after, Rhea sat for her grad school exam. True to his word, Jace emailed her recommendation letter the same day—before results were even out.

When she mentioned it, he simply said, “Not early. You’ll need it soon.”

His quiet confidence in her was jarring—stronger than her own.

“You’ve been busy lately, haven’t you?” she asked.

“Why do you say that?”

“You haven’t called much,” she admitted. Their twice-a-week calls had been her anchor. When they stopped, the silence hit hard. She’d almost called yesterday—but didn’t want to bother him.

Muffled voices came through his end, like he was speaking to someone. Then: “Yeah. A bit busy.”

“Can you share?”

“Not yet,” he said, dodging.

Her brows furrowed, but he smoothly steered the conversation elsewhere. Only after they hung up did she realize he’d completely avoided her question.

But soon, she found out.

“Dean Chapman’s getting transferred—promoted, they say,” Harlow gossiped.

Rhea blinked. “A dean can get promoted?”

Harlow rolled her eyes. “Duh! Bigger city, better pay. What do you think he’s grinding for?”

“I thought he was just old and bored,” Rhea teased.

Harlow groaned. "You live under a rock. You're always buried in cases or textbooks. Read the news sometimes!"

With the dean's departure, the position was wide open. Rhea chewed her pen thoughtfully. "Wonder who's coming."

Harlow, the hospital's unofficial grapevine, was stumped. "No clue. But whoever it is, they've got serious connections. No way I missed it otherwise."

Rhea shrugged. Gossip never stuck with her. Whoever it was—just another boss.

Famous last words.

On the new dean's first day, Rhea walked into the office with some paperwork, curious about the so-called "monster" taking over. She pushed open the door—and froze.

"Jace? What are you doing here?"

Her expression must've been priceless, because he laughed.

His smile was open, unguarded—his usual ice melted. "Surprised? I wanted to shock you, but you look terrified."

Her heart pounded. "Terrified is right! Why *are* you here? You were fine in the capital. Why this?"

Everyone had assumed the new dean would be some powerful insider. Jace? City A's hospital was decent, but it couldn't compare to Belourvinelle. Was he really throwing his future away?

Seeing her near tears, Jace's expression softened. "This wasn't sudden. I've been planning it."

"But... your career?"

"It's fine," he said simply.

She wanted to shake him. Why take such a risk? But his calm, steady confidence was soothing. Still, she was annoyed he hadn't told her.

She missed the weight behind his words—*your dean*.

"New city, new job," Jace said. "No welcome gift?"

She paused, then offered, "Where are you staying? I'll cook for you."

Chapter 936

Jace hesitated. Then nodded. “Alright. I’ll tidy up.”

Rhea didn’t think much of it at the time—caught up in the moment. But when she arrived at his place, she did a double take. “Wait... isn’t this the same house as before? I thought you said it belonged to a friend.”

“I bought it from them,” Jace said, his gaze flickering toward her.

She missed the subtle look, too unsure of his social circle to pry. The same nanny greeted them, but this time, no one stopped her from heading to the kitchen.

Halfway through prep, though, she hit a snag—no gas, and the fridge was practically empty.

The nanny smacked her forehead. “I forgot to shop! I’ll go now—”

“No need,” Jace said. “We’ll go.”

Both the nanny and Rhea blinked. Grocery shopping with Jace felt... oddly domestic. Her pulse quickened. The nanny caught her expression and grinned. “Alright, don’t take too long.”

They headed out, coats on. It wasn’t late, so the shelves were still full—but prices were steep. Rhea muttered, “Should’ve come later for discounts.”

Jace glanced over but said nothing.

As they browsed, a commotion broke out nearby—people scrambling for discounted hairy crabs. Rhea perked up. “Do you eat crabs?”

“Yeah,” Jace replied, setting down a cabbage.

Sleeves rolled up, Rhea dove into the fray like a seasoned pro, her basket high. “Make way!”

The crowd parted for her swinging basket. Quick and sharp-eyed, she snagged the freshest, juiciest ones. An auntie nearby gasped, “Girl, leave some for us! This sale’s rare!”

Rhea, a little sheepish, grabbed one more, then gestured vaguely behind her. “Sorry—someone at home loves them.”

She figured no one would hear, but the auntie followed her gaze—straight to Jace. Her eyes widened. “Your boyfriend?”

Rhea froze, panicking. Before she could deny it, Jace stepped in, calm and smooth.

“Yes, I’m her boyfriend. I love crabs, so she got excited. Sorry for the trouble.”

The words stunned Rhea—and everyone else. Her face burned as he pulled her away, eyes teasing.

“Why so red? Fever?” he asked.

He reached toward her forehead, but she dodged. “No, just... hot in here.”

Jace didn’t press, but he was quietly pleased. Killian had been right—sometimes, taking the lead worked best.

That night, Rhea made braised hairy crabs. Jace ate heartily. As the new dean, he settled into City A’s hospital with ease, quickly winning everyone over.

A few days later, before Rhea got her exam results, Jace casually dropped a bombshell.

“The hospital’s filling a vice dean position. I think you should run.”

She pointed at herself, wide-eyed. “*Me?*”

“You’re capable,” he said simply.

Rhea stared at him. She wanted to scream *I care about my own opinion, not yours!* but sighed instead. “You’re overestimating me.”

Sure, she’d come far. But in medicine, experience was king. Vice deans were usually in their forties or fifties. Jace was the exception—but even he got pushback because of his age.

“No one would vote for me,” she muttered.

Jace raised a brow. “You don’t know that. You’d have my vote.”

Her heart skipped before she tamped it down. “Your vote’s nice, but it’s not enough.”

Jace slammed the table. “Try. See what happens.”

She relented, slowly swayed by his logic. When news of her candidacy spread, the hospital buzzed with gossip.

Harlow nearly dropped her coffee. “You’re *serious?*”

“Just trying,” Rhea said. But whispers followed. People talked—rumors of backdoor connections to Jace were already flying.

Chapter 937

The gossip didn’t faze Rhea, but Harlow was livid. “They’re just jealous! Why spread lies?”

Rhea handed her a cup of tea, amused. “Chill. Have some Dahongpao. I got it online—supposedly the real deal.”

Harlow took a sip, then sputtered. “They’re trashing you*! You’re seriously not mad?”

Rhea shook her head. “Been through it before.”

In Belourvinelle, she’d heard worse—whispers of favoritism, of things with Jace that were never true. She’d long grown numb to it. Harlow gave her a sympathetic pat on the head. “Poor thing. You’ve been through the wringer.”

“Get lost,” Rhea laughed, swatting her hand away. Their friendship had dropped all formalities by now.

“By the way—aren’t your results out today?” Harlow asked suddenly.

Rhea gasped. She had almost forgotten. Heart pounding, she checked her email. The message was there. She clicked it open—and whooped. “I passed! I got in!”

Harlow screamed in excitement, then shot a smug glare toward the rumor mill. “Let them talk now. Could a ‘nobody’ ace grad school?”

Rhea grinned, steadying her. “Forget them. Hold down the fort—I’ll be back.”

She bolted to find Jace—his notes had been critical to her passing. Ignoring the stares, she pushed open his office door—and froze.

A nurse was leaning into Jace, her posture suggestive. When she saw Rhea, she feigned panic and ducked behind him. “Dean! Dr. Neufeld’s here! She looks mad—will she hit me?”

Rhea’s fists clenched. “Sorry. I didn’t mean to interrupt—”

A sharp thud cut her off. Jace had shoved the nurse aside, sending her sprawling. His voice was cold. “Don’t touch me with unsterilized hands.”

The nurse turned ghost-pale, clearly humiliated. To him, it was about hygiene—he was a germaphobe. But to anyone else, the moment felt deeply personal. He didn’t bother to explain.

She fled, avoiding Rhea’s eyes.

“I thought I walked in on something,” Rhea said, voice tentative.

Jace’s expression softened. “I don’t even know her. She barged in just before you did.”

Rhea relaxed, the pressure in her chest lifting. “Probably tied to the hospital gossip.”

Jace’s jaw clenched. He silently vowed to kill every last rumor.

“Why’d you come?” he asked, changing the subject.

The awkwardness lingered, dimming her joy, but she rallied. “I passed grad school! All that’s left is publishing my paper.”

His face lit up. “You know how to start?”

She shook her head. He waved her over to his computer, pulling up a document. “Here—use my last paper as a reference.”

Midway through his explanation, her hand brushed against his cuff. Remembering his earlier reaction to touch, she recoiled. “I didn’t disinfect—”

“No need,” he said, catching her hand and tugging her close.

From behind her, he guided her through the layout of the paper, his voice low, his scent—clean, grounded—filling her senses. His hand ruffled her hair. “Focus, naughty student.”

She tried. Really, she did. But his nearness turned even medical jargon into a love song. When he asked, “Got it?” she turned to him, caught in his eyes, and lied, “Yeah.”

He sighed and tapped her head, half fond, half exasperated. “Again. This time, pay attention.”

His voice was like warm velvet—making focus nearly impossible. By the time she fled the office, her cheeks were on fire and her heart was pounding. Study later, she told herself. Much later.

Chapter 938

Outside, Rhea slapped her cheeks to cool off. Her heart still raced. Did anyone see?

“Dr. Neufeld?” a woman’s voice called.

It was the mother of a patient, carrying her young daughter. Concern sparked in Rhea as she noticed how pale and withdrawn the girl looked.

After a few questions, Rhea learned this wasn’t the girl’s first visit—it was a recurring issue. In her office, she examined her, frowning. “Her stomach’s fine. Where’s the pain?”

The mother hesitated. Rhea softened her tone. “You’re safe here. Don’t worry. We’re here to help, not judge.”

That gentleness cracked something open. The woman broke down, sobbing. Rhea gently comforted her, coaxing out the truth—and what came out was almost too much to bear.

She was a rural housewife, married off young to a man eight years older. She’d spent years keeping house, caring for in-laws, trying to be the perfect wife. Then, after she gave birth to a daughter, her husband, obsessed with having a son, grew increasingly violent. Lately, she’d discovered he’d done something unforgivable—he had assaulted their little girl.

Rhea went still. “He did what to her?”

She ordered a gynecological exam immediately. The results—tears, inflammation—made her hands tremble with fury. She arranged treatment while trying to calm the devastated mother, who could barely speak.

“Take these tissues,” Rhea said, quietly. “This is horrific. You *must* take legal action.”

The woman, wiping her tears, cried, “I gave him everything—cooked, cleaned, cared for his family. Why would he do this to her?”

“You’re missing the point,” Rhea said, firmly. “You need to protect your daughter. The law *must* be involved.”

“I *tried*! I filed for divorce, but the court said I needed evidence. Our village doesn’t have cameras. He’s careful—there’s no proof. He says someone else did it.”

Rhea felt sick. Divorce was *this* hard?

The woman continued, “If it were just me, I’d leave. But I have my daughter. What do I do?”

The little girl, sensing the pain in the room, patted her mother’s back. “Don’t cry, Mommy. I’m fine.”

She was eight. She thought it was a game—with rewards for staying silent.

Rhea’s heart shattered.

She closed the office door, leaving them to comfort each other, and stormed out—rage fueling her as she made a beeline for Jace’s office.

No answer.

As she raised her hand again, his voice came from behind. “Looking for me?”

She spun. He looked exhausted. “Just got out of surgery,” he muttered, tugging at his coat.

“I need your help,” she said, her voice urgent.

Inside his office, she told him everything. The words spilled out in a rush. Jace’s expression hardened with each sentence. By the end, his eyes were cold steel.

“Can you help?” she asked, throat dry.

He didn’t hesitate. “I know someone. Ex-lawyer, good connections. He’ll be here tomorrow. You’re coming with me.”

Relief surged in her chest. “Thank you.”

She ran to tell the mother, who burst into tears again—this time, from gratitude. “You’re an angel, Dr. Neufeld. I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

Rhea smiled softly. “Just doing what I can. We’ll know more after the meeting tomorrow.”

Chapter 939

To the woman, it didn’t matter whether the outcome was guaranteed. Rhea had offered hope, and that was more than she’d received in years.

But for Rhea, the weight was heavier. She took a day off, put her other cases aside, and prepared. When the day came, Jace picked her up himself.

They met the lawyer at a quiet coffee shop. “Miss Neufeld,” he greeted, offering a handshake. “I’m from Belourvinelle Law Firm. You can call me Dhillon.”

“Thank you for coming all this way,” Rhea said, shaking his hand.

“It’s nothing,” Dhillon replied. “I was already in City A. Plus, this is a favor for a friend. I couldn’t say no.”

After some small talk, they got down to business. Since Dhillon only knew the broad strokes, Rhea laid out the full story. He listened closely, jotting notes, asking sharp questions.

By the end, her throat felt raw. She reached for a drink—but Jace had already slid a glass of warm water to her. “You’ve been sniffing lately. Warm water’s better.”

She took it without thinking—only realizing mid-sip it was *his* glass. He hadn’t used it, but still. She glanced up. He was skimming the menu, completely unbothered.

Maybe... he didn’t mind?

“I understand the situation,” Dhillon said, closing his notebook.

Rhea set the glass down. “Can you take the case?”

Her voice trembled with urgency. This wasn’t just a patient—this was a girl trapped in hell. And as a woman, Rhea couldn’t turn away.

Dhillon adjusted his glasses. “I can. But... this won’t be cheap. Legal defense takes resources.”

Rhea’s heart sank. Most of her savings had gone to the Seguin family. Her salary—good by hospital standards—still wasn’t enough for someone like Dhillon.

"I'll cover what I can," she offered quickly. "Just tell me the amount—"

"I'll pay," Jace said, cutting in.

She blinked at him. "What?"

"I hired him," Jace said simply. "I'll pay. Don't worry about it."

Her heart ached in the best way—nothing was more moving than a man who quietly stepped up. But part of her still felt uneasy. After Dhillon left, she turned to Jace.

"Sorry about the cost. I'll pay you back."

He gave her a look. "I said I've got it. End of story."

In the car, he glanced at her, his gaze soft under the afternoon sun. Her heart skipped. "What?" she asked. "Why're you looking at me like that?"

His lips quirked. "If you want to thank me, finish your paper."

Her stomach dropped. Really? Her paper?

The moment dissolved, and she forgot how her face had flushed seconds earlier.

The case soon moved to court. Rhea couldn't do much more—except offer support. The mother returned to thank her again.

"Work with Dhillon," Rhea said, squeezing her hand. "We'll get your daughter out."

"I will," the woman vowed.

News spread quickly in the hospital. Harlow was stunned. "You're a saint. Do we give out awards for this? Because I'd nominate you."

Rhea laughed. "No awards. Just more trouble."

And trouble came faster than expected.

"Where's Dr. Neufeld?!" a man shouted, storming into the hospital.

He grabbed a nurse. She pointed to Rhea's office, terrified.

Too late.

Rhea had just finished with a patient when her door slammed open. The moment she sensed danger, she moved to shield the woman behind her.

A hard slap knocked her sideways. Stars burst in her vision.

“Who are you? Why are you hitting her?!” the patient screamed.

The man grabbed Rhea’s hair, snarling. “Ask this meddling bitch who I am! Got my wife to divorce me, didn’t you?! If I can’t get to her, I’ll kill *you*!”

Pain flared across Rhea’s scalp as he yanked her toward the window.

Fourth floor. No guardrail.

His intent was crystal clear.

“There are cameras everywhere!” she shouted. “You’ll go down for murder!”

He sneered.

She wasn’t reasoning—she was stalling.

Chapter 940

Seizing the moment, Rhea drove her knee into his groin.

He let out a strangled howl and released her. She bolted, grabbing whatever she could—a medical chart, a plastic water cup—and hurled them behind her as she fled down the corridor.

She slammed into someone outside the ward, panic surging. “No! Get out of my way!” she cried, swinging instinctively.

But her arm was caught mid-swing.

“Why so scared? Who hurt you?” Jace’s voice broke through the haze of fear.

Tears spilled down her cheeks as she collapsed into his arms. His solid presence, the gentle way he held her—it soothed her trembling. Her breath hitched as she tried to explain.

Then a roar split the air.

“You bitch! I’ll kill you!”

The man barreled out, a glint of steel flashing in his hand—a dagger.

Gasps erupted from nearby patients and staff. Rhea screamed, “Careful!” as the blade arced toward them.

But Jace was faster. In one smooth motion, he stepped in front of her, kicked the man's groin with lethal precision, and knocked the weapon away. The man crumpled but thrashed wildly. Jace dropped on him, knee pressed into his spine, hand clamped around his throat.

"Move, and I'll break you," he said, voice low and lethal.

The man froze.

So did Rhea.

This wasn't the cool, composed dean she knew. This was something darker. Primal. Dangerous. Her heart raced as she reached for his arm.

"Jace."

His wild eyes locked on hers—unseeing, feral. But in a blink, recognition returned. The fury faded, replaced by the man she knew.

Without a word, he stood and handed the attacker off to the incoming security team. "Take him to the police. Attempted murder. Vandalism."

The clinic itself was unharmed, but Jace wasn't pulling punches. The investigation revealed the attacker was the girl's father—furious over the divorce Rhea had encouraged.

Rhea's stomach turned. "You abused your daughter and you're still making trouble? You deserve to rot."

The police hauled him away, and silence slowly returned.

Then came Harlow, sidling up with a smirk. "Was that an eye twitch?"

Rhea blinked. "What?"

"Don't play dumb! You were hugging the dean in front of everyone. Spill it."

Rhea flushed. She hadn't even realized what it must've looked like. In the moment, she'd only clung to him for safety. Mortified, she fumbled for words, but came up empty. What could she even say? Her connection with Jace defied simple labels.

Harlow pouted. "Fine, no tea. But the dean's hand was bleeding. Aren't you gonna check?"

Rhea's breath caught. *He was hurt?* She didn't wait for more, taking off at a run. Behind her, Harlow's amused laughter echoed.

Jace was nowhere to be found. Not in the ward, not with security.

She guessed right: his office.

She burst in without knocking.

He was there, shirt sleeves rolled, fumbling with a roll of gauze. The bandage was crooked, blood seeping through. Sunset light poured across the desk, casting golden shadows across his face.

Her heart squeezed.

She crossed the room and took the bandage from him. “You’re a doctor. Don’t you know how to wrap this?”

Her voice mimicked his usual tone—dry, teasing. Jace blinked, as if coming back to himself. He let her unwind the mess. As she rewrapped the wound carefully, silence stretched between them. Heavy. Warm.

“You got questions for me?” he asked suddenly, voice rough.

She tilted her head. “Like what?”

His eyes searched hers, something raw flickering there. Then he looked away. “Nothing.”