

Wedded Bride 391

Chapter 391 On A Vacation

On their way back home, Chris barely uttered a word until she asked a rather pertinent question,

"Autumn, do you know... why Edward does not want to start a family with Rachel, after all they did just get married?"

Chris frowned, as she wondered what he was thinking. "He is old and just married Rachel, so he should be thrilled after learning that Rachel is pregnant? But Rachel's expression reflected that... my dad didn't want her to get pregnant, " Chris said confusedly.

Then she added, "I first noticed his weird expression and aversion when Rachel brought up the topic of having a child in our home." Autumn also got confused upon hearing Chris' dilemma. After a while, she too recalled what Gary told her right before they left and suddenly came upon a realization.

'Maybe... the fight Edward was involved in years ago had led to his impotency?

If that is the truth, then Edward's weird attitude and Gary's words could be justified and understood, '

Autumn thought.

"What are you thinking about?" Chris cast a glimpse at Autumn and asked.

Autumn stopped introspecting and added, "Nothing. Chris, if Rachel comes to bother you with this

matter again, please just stay away from her. You shouldn't get involved in this drama, it will only lead to trouble with her involved."

If Autumn's guess was the truth, then Chris had better keep away from this, or else, she could cause trouble for herself.

Autumn was just about to leave for a vacation with Charles soon, but now suddenly all she could do was to worry about Chris.

"I understand." Chris nodded her head and added, "I'm not close with Rachel at all let alone sharing any relation, so there is no reason for me to get involved in her mess. I would be a fool not to know better."

Chris had never thought ill of Rachel's unborn baby, but she still wouldn't persuade Edward for Rachel.

"Okay." Autumn felt assured as she heard Chris' promise and said, "In short, stay away from Rachel recently and prevent her from stirring any trouble for you."

"OK, sounds good to me!" Chris nodded with a smile.

On Wednesday, Charles and Autumn woke up early to leave for their much awaited trip. As Chris was

still asleep, they left after bidding goodbye only to Gary.

Luckily, it was sunny after two days of rain, seeming to indicate that it was a nice trip.

They chose an island as their destination. On their way there on boat, Autumn had never seen such a beautiful and vast scenery. It was an overwhelming sight, like a green paradise in the middle of the sea.

As the boat approached it gradually, Autumn could see it more and more clearly. Once the boat came to a halt, Charles got off first and then extended his hand to Autumn.

"Be careful." Charles helped her get off the boat carefully. Then he took all their luggage and went to the hotel where they reserved a sea-view suite. Autumn fell on the bed happily as they entered the room and she exclaimed, "Wow! Happy holiday, I'm finally here !"

Charles looked at Autumn with affection and said with a smile, "It sounds like I had you locked away in a dreadful place for a long time."

"Yes, you did!" Autumn blamed him in a playful tone. Autumn sat up and said, "Can you believe this is the first time that we have come for a vacation together since we got married."

Charles put their luggage away and promised to Autumn, "I will spend several days to go on vacation with you every year from now on. We will see the entire world, my love."

"Really, you mean that?" Autumn's face lit up with happiness. She stretched out her hand, as she entwined her finger with Charles' as a swear. "You have sworn it and I will punish you if you break your promise."

Charles smiled, wondering why she was so childish.

They rested for some time, and then Autumn put on a floral skirt to go with the theme of their beach vacation. They then went to the seaside. They wandered on the beach hand in hand. It was almost dusk but they were able to enjoy the beautiful scenery of the dimming sun and settling waves. Autumn walked with barefoot and gave a sincere smile. Charles hadn't seen her smile like this for a long time.

He suddenly felt that he made a right decision to take her on a vacation. Even though he did it only for her smile.

They came across some couples taking wedding pictures. Autumn looked at them with admiration.

Although she never complained for not having any wedding pictures, Charles understood what she was thinking and feeling.

They married in a hurry so they had no time to take wedding pictures. This became Autumn's

unfinished dream.

Charles left Autumn and walked towards the couples suddenly. Autumn was amazed and asked him,

"What are you going to do, Charles?"

"Wait a minute, I will be right back. " Charles approached the couple and told them something which made them turn back and look at Autumn together.

Autumn had no idea what happened let alone what he said. She looked at the couple and found they were nodding their heads to Charles. Charles bowed to show his appreciation and walked up to the photographer. The girl from the couple approached to Autumn. "Follow me, please, "

She said with a smile.

"Where are we going?" Autumn asked in confusion.

"You'll know everything in a few moments, please follow me, " the girl said with an air of mystery. She led Autumn to a dressing room and took off her wedding gown. "I think this gown will flatter you as well because your figure is similar to mine. Please put it on quickly, or else you won't be able to take your perfect wedding pictures after the sunset, " she said.

"Take photos?" Autumn was surprised and realized what Charles did for her. Even though she felt sorry

for this couple, she was really moved by Charles' thoughtful gesture.

She looked at the girl with guilt and said, "I'm so sorry to have caused you so much trouble."

"Never mind." The girl happily put on the wedding gown for Autumn and said to her, "Your husband loves you so much and I'm happy to help you get your perfect moment. It makes my day even more memorable."

Then Autumn chatted with this girl for a short time, and realized that this couple also came from Y City.

What a coincidence!

Charles had also changed his clothes as Autumn came out of the dressing room. He stood by the gate with a bunch of flowers in his hands while the sun almost set behind him, giving Autumn a sense of eternity.

They took a set of beautiful pictures. The photographer praised that their affection for each other and

their chemistry was clearly reflecting in the pictures even though they didn't pose on purpose.

Chapter 392 Rachel's Pregnancy, Edward's Fury (Part One)

Charles wrote down his phone number and email on a piece of paper and handed it to the

photographer who promised to give him the photos he took of Charles and Autumn. "I will send them to

you once I get home, " the lensman assured. There were no wedding pictures before, and Charles was very glad that he could make up for it now. The couple were so overjoyed and profusely thanked the photographer.

Dinner was equally enjoyable as Charles and Autumn had their share of sumptuous seafood. The next day, the couple went snorkeling and then climbing. Autumn knew she would always treasure their stay in the island resort, calling it the best days she had ever spent with her husband.

Meanwhile, Leila could not wait to get back to work as soon as the wound on her face started to heal.

On her return, the rumors about her relationship with Charles had become widespread. The woman worried that if Charles heard of the rumor, he would treat her differently, and her efforts would have been for nothing. The other concern was David, who had left with Charles on the day they came to visit her. So she was quite anxious to see her boss again.

She had been waiting for hours, but still Charles did not show up and his office door remained shut.

Finally, she asked Alice who happened to walk by. "Alice, why hasn't Mr. Lu shown up yet?" Leila inquired. She had pulled her co-worker aside.

Surprised, Alice replied, "Oh, Mr. Lu said he was going away for a week with Mrs. Lu. They're on their

honeymoon."

It was Leila's turn to be stunned.

"Honeymoon?" she nearly squeaked.

Her thoughts were in a scramble.

Inwardly she groaned. 'I've been doing everything so Charles and I would become closer, ' she thought.

'But once they get back from that honeymoon, their relationship will surely be stronger. What am I supposed to do now?'

Struggling with anger, she clenched her fists, which did not go unnoticed by Alice. She could not help but mock Leila, "They are husband and wife, after all, so there's nothing wrong if they went on a honeymoon trip, right?"

She continued to taunt Leila, "Why the long face? Are you all right?"

Leila quickly composed herself, and used her condition as an excuse. "Oh, I'm fine, although I suddenly don't feel well."

Alice pretended to be concerned. "If you're not feeling well, why don't you go home and rest some

more. Mr. Lu did give you a holiday, didn't he?"

She looked at Leila closely and gave a slight smirk. Alice wished she could say her thoughts aloud. 'I

know Leila has feelings for Mr. Lu. But how can she be so shameless as to ask me about his

whereabouts like it was any of her business? Her ambition to break up the newlyweds by becoming his

mistress is just a foolish fantasy!'

Aside from anger, Leila also felt insulted but chose to remain silent. She swore under her breath while

clenching and unclenching her fists. 'I like Charles and he will fall in love with me, sooner or later. And

when I become his partner, I am firing this woman!'

It rained on the last day of Autumn and Charles's honeymoon trip. She dropped to the bed and

watched rain pelting the windows of the hotel room. She sighed, "I was planning on going out for a

walk, but I guess that's not going to happen. Tsk. Tsk. Such a pity to end the trip staying inside the

hotel."

Charles sat beside her and rubbed his wife's arm. "That's okay. We can always come back once a year,

if you like."

She was still upset as Charles packed their luggage. "Hey, don't be sad. We're leaving soon, " he said.

It wasn't only the rain that had dampened Autumn's mood. She didn't want to leave because it was the best time she had ever had.

Suddenly, she jumped off the bed and declared, "When we grow older, we can look for an island where we can shut ourselves off from the world. Agreed?"

Charles hugged Autumn tightly, released her slowly, and promised, "I definitely agree! And no matter where you want to go, I will be there with you. Whatever you want to do, I will do my best to make it happen."

Autumn used a local SIM card during their overseas trip. She replaced this with her own card upon arriving at Y City. As soon as the phone powered up, it started pinging to indicate several messages being received. Many were from Roger. One read, "Mrs. Lu, big news!"

The messages were sent just that day. Autumn was about to call Roger when Chris ran towards them.

She was tasked to pick them up from the airport. It was difficult to be the bearer of bad news, so she started to apologize. "Charles, Autumn, something bad has happened. We won't be driving home first."

"What happened?" Autumn asked worriedly.

She was guessing it had something to do with Rachel. Otherwise, Roger would not have been sending her several messages.

Fearful and anxious, Chris replied, "Rachel called. She said Edward hit her. I need to go to their house."

More than being worried about Rachel, Chris feared that Edward would beat the woman to death, if he truly lost control of himself.

Charles stepped forward and patted Chris on the arm.

"We'll go with you, " he said.

He stowed their luggage in the trunk and took the car key from Chris.

Charles drove as fast as he was allowed. Chris was beside herself with worry that Edward would really become unhinged and get himself in big trouble. She remembered how he roared while she was on the phone with Rachel.

Beside her, Autumn held Chris's hand for comfort. "Don't worry. We'll be there soon."

Being welcomed by a very disturbing incident was the last thing Autumn expected. At that point, her good mood and happy memories from their trip were overshadowed by the distressing news. If it were

only possible to buy a ticket and run away to anywhere. She simply wanted to escape from such depressing situations.

Twenty minutes later, they arrived at Edward's house. Chris and Autumn got off, and Charles went to park the vehicle. Upon reaching the door, they heard something crash. The door was open and they entered just as a vase came flying towards them. The two women managed to duck in time, and the vase shattered into pieces. They gripped each other's hands in fear.

"Father!" Chris cried out.

Edward's fury was written all over his face. He had broken everything he could get his hands on. There was no place to stand clear of shattered glass or porcelain.

"What are you doing here?" Edward thundered.

He was astonished at his daughter's presence. Slowly, he rubbed his face, hoping to wipe away the rage.

"Rachel called to say you quarreled. What are you doing, Father?"

She was nearly in tears while looking at her surroundings.

Chris saw broken glass, books, and paper strewn all over the floor and the house in disarray.

"This has nothing to do with you, " Edward replied, trying to calm himself.

"You can leave now. I can handle this."

Chris pleaded with her father. "What happened to make you do all this?"

When he remained silent, she said, "Tell me, please. You're making me nervous!"

She crossed the room, avoiding everything that was scattered on the floor until she stood in front of

Edward. She caught his hand and with a worried look, asked again, "What happened that made you so angry?"

Edward felt the rage slowly coming back.

"I told you it had nothing to do with you, " he snapped.

Chris's persistence triggered his temper anew. He would rather lash out at Chris than admit shamefully about her stepmother's unforgivable situation, which had shook his world.

He slapped away Chris's hand, but the force threw his daughter off-balance so she ended up slumped on the floor. Chris saw the cut on her hand caused by the shards of porcelain strewn on the ground.

Chris hissed in pain as she saw the trickle of blood oozing from her hand.

Autumn quickly helped Chris rise to her feet. She asked, "Are you hurt?"

Chris shook her head to assure Autumn that she was fine, and the injury was not serious. Throughout her ordeal, she kept her attention on Edward, who could no longer hide his fury.

She had never seen him so angry and it terrified her.

Just then, Charles walked into the room, frowning at the mess and looking at the faces of Chris and

Edward. He looked around for Rachel but did not see her. He saw the cut on Chris's hand then asked,

"What happened?"

As Chris was about to reply, the bedroom door opened and Rachel stepped out. She had locked

herself in, fearful that Edward would hurt her. As soon as she heard Charles's voice, she came out to

seek help. Rachel quickly moved behind Charles and grabbing his hand she pleaded, "Please help

me!"

Rachel was in a dilemma about when to tell Edward she was pregnant. But she learned his lawyer was

scheduled to come to the house that day and would be discussing about transferring his shares to

Chris. Rachel knew she had to do it today. Edward had previously told her he did not want another

child, but she did not take his words seriously.

So Rachel told Edward about the pregnancy and was stunned at his reaction, because he flew into a rage and slapped her hard on the face. Shocked and in pain, she was terrified he would hurt her even more. So she ran into the bedroom, locked herself in and then called Chris.

Chapter 393 Rachel's Pregnancy, Edward's Fury (Part Two)

Rachel also dialed Roger's number to tell him what Edward had done to her.

Hearing Charles' voice, she thought it was safe to come out of the room. And she quickly hid behind his back, to avoid being hurt by Edward. "Help me, please, " she reiterated her plea.

Rachel knew her unborn child was key to get a share of Edward's wealth so she would do everything to protect it.

"Come here, you bitch!" Edward roared and tried to grab Rachel.

He was so furious at seeing Rachel and would have reached her had Chris not held him back. The woman continued to cower behind Charles.

But Edward was unstoppable. He continued ranting, "Shameless bitch! You better tell me the truth.

Who is that baby's father?"

Shaking from fear, she retorted, "Stop talking nonsense! Who else could the baby's father be?"

Rachel kept thinking that no one was aware of her affair with Roger so she had to keep up the lie that it was Edward's baby.

But her husband would have none of it. "I'll kill you if you don't stop lying!"

Edward was shaking in anger, too. And he badly wanted to beat up his wife after what she said. Chris, however, used all her strength to prevent her father from hurting his wife.

Despite her bleeding hand, she held on to Edward tightly, and hugged him. She cried, "Dad, you're going to kill her if you don't calm down. Please, let's sit down and talk this through."

But Edward was adamant. "Let me go, Chris! The only thing I want to do now is to get my hands on that woman!"

Eyes smoldering, he looked at his daughter and said, "I didn't trust you when you told me the truth about this woman. And I regret that now. If only I listened to you, I wouldn't have been cheated by this bitch! She needs to be taught a lesson, so don't try to stop me."

Rachel was not to be outdone. "What are you talking about? I have never cheated on you!" she screamed.

Fear, anxiety and nerves were getting to her, but she continued to deny his accusations.

Chris tried to reason with her father. "Dad, killing her is not worth it. At what cost, your freedom?"

She rubbed his back to pacify him. "Let's all calm down and talk. Fighting will never solve problems."

Edward gradually calmed down, as his daughter continued to hold on to him. Then he turned to

Charles, "You shouldn't involve yourself in this mess. This has nothing to do with you. If you go on

protecting her, I'm going to start looking at you as an enemy, just like her."

But Rachel desperately hung on to Charles, begging, "Help me, for old times' sake... please!"

But Charles knew not to interfere with problems between a married couple. He told Rachel, "You

married my uncle so I will stay out of your business. You need to work out your problems yourself."

He brushed aside Rachel's hands and moved closer to Autumn. Very concerned, he asked, "Are you all

right?"

Autumn nodded, grateful for her husband's concern. It was this display of tenderness that made Rachel

jealous of Autumn. 'Why is Charles more worried about his wife when it's me who is in trouble?' Rachel

thought.

Chris spoke again, "Sit down, Dad. And let's talk."

Edward allowed himself to be seated. "What happened?" Chris asked again, looking at her father, then

Rachel.

"Why don't you ask that woman?" Edward said scornfully. "She can answer your question."

But his anger pushed him to snarl at Rachel again. "Tell me honestly... who is the father of your baby?"

"Why do you keep asking me that? I told you the baby is yours!"

Rachel was beginning to get worried that Edward seemed very certain that child could not be his. But she kept up with her deception.

"Bullshit!" the man roared, jolting everyone in the room.

Rachel's refusal to admit the truth enraged him once again, so he threatened her, "I guess I just have to beat the truth out of you, won't I?"

With those words, he stood up, grabbed a stick leaning nearby and was about to whack a shuddering

Rachel when Chris rushed towards him to prevent him from becoming more violent. "Dad, please don't do this!"

After a moment's hesitation, she carefully asked, "Uh... how do you know you're not the baby's father?"

Rachel saw an opening and blurted out, "Yes, what makes you think you're not this child's father?"

Finding momentum, Rachel went on, "I've always treated you respectfully and with love, and I have never cheated on you since we got married. How could you even think this is not your baby?"

With a devious glint in her eye that no one noticed, Rachel added, "I'm thinking you just want don't want the responsibility of being a father."

Her words made Edward even more furious. He grabbed a glass that escaped his wrath earlier and hurled it towards Rachel while cursing her. "Bitch! I will kill you!"

Briefly taken aback, Rachel found her courage and warned, "Strike me again and I will call the police."

Having other people around her made Rachel feel safe, and brave.

Still, she felt shaky after uttering the bold statement. Rachel hoped Edward felt threatened enough to stop.

Instead, he became more furious and called her bluff. "Go ahead and call the police! But I don't think they can arrive in time to save you, " he sneered.

Tearfully, Rachel said, "My only wish is to have a baby. What could be so wrong with that?"

Turning to her husband, she added, "Why do you treat me like this?"

Have I not been a good wife to you?"

Rachel suddenly sank to the floor and burst into tears.

Edward gritted his teeth and ground out, "I told you before I don't want kids. Yet here you are going against my wishes."

Sniffing, his wife replied, "But I'm still young, so why can't I have a baby?"

She looked up at Edward and declared, "I've always wanted a child and have taken every effort to become pregnant. So it's very cruel for you to suspect that this child is not yours."

Edward took a deep breath to remain calm.

"When I was in combat duty, " he began, "I did paralyze many of our enemies. But in the process, I was also severely injured and this resulted in my inability to have children." He looked at his wife and said,

"So can you now understand why I'm certain the baby you're carrying is not mine?"

His confession startled both Charles and Chris. They looked at each other and then turned to Edward, whose eyes were filled with grief. Both of them realized the truth was kept from them because they were very young at that time.

Autumn, however, sort of had an idea what may have triggered Edward's violent reaction when told Rachel was having his baby. She never actually thought he would admit this before other people.

Edward spoke to Rachel quietly. "It is a shame for a man to admit he can't have children, so I kept it a secret for so many years. There is no way for me to believe you are having a child unless you cheated on me.

And I was so stupid to fall into your trap!" he said.

In disbelief, Rachel cried out, "No! That's impossible!"

She glared at her husband, trying to steady herself. Now she understood why Edward would look so unhappy each time she told him about wanting to have a baby. It was impossible for him to have a child.

The reality of the situation made Rachel panic. She'd made a huge mistake and had no idea how to get out of it.

Still, she refused to give up.

"Maybe the doctor who treated you made a mistake with the diagnosis."

Rachel suggested, "Sometimes, doctors can make mistakes."

Already caught, Rachel continued to deny that she had cheated on Edward and was having a baby with another man. She was turning restless, trying to concoct more lies. Her husband's secret was something she never imagined and now regretted becoming pregnant.

Chapter 394 Rachel's Pregnancy, Edward's Fury (Part Three)

Edward stared at Rachel while recalling his ordeal. "When I was given the news, I went to seek the opinion of several other doctors, going to hospitals here and abroad, asking if there was a way to reverse my condition. But everyone said the same thing. There was still no cure for this medical condition."

His eyes then took on a look of steel. "And then you tell me that your pregnancy test says you're having a baby? Do you really think you can fool me? Not everyone is as stupid as you are!" he spat.

Edward drew a long breath and then exhaled deeply. He was beginning to regret not listening to Chris' advice before deciding to marry Rachel. He even defended Rachel in front of his family, hoping to make them see that Rachel was really a kind and wonderful woman and that they simply misunderstood her.

Now everything he'd said and done seemed so ridiculous. Everyone, except himself, saw Rachel's true character.

No one was more surprised at the revelations than Chris. And she knew underneath the anger, her father was really just saddened by Rachel's deception. This time, the woman was truly reaping what she had sown.

But Edward was her main concern. "Dad, you know how too much anger is bad for your health. You need to calm down. Here, have some water, " she offered.

Chris handed him a glass, and then assured her father, "No matter what happens, I'm here for you. You will never be alone."

Edward suddenly felt uncomfortable hearing his daughter's reassuring words. He realized he owed the girl so much for everything that had happened in the last twenty years. And if he'd only listened to her warning about Rachel, things may not have gotten worse.

It was true what people said that experience was the best teacher. But it was lucky for Edward who could do something about bad situations.

Seeing that she was not gaining any sympathy, Rachel bawled out loud and clutched her husband's leg. "Edward, I am truly sorry. Please, please forgive me, " she begged.

In her heart, she knew Edward would never trust her again, so Rachel decided the best thing to do was

grovel. Perhaps, that would soften his heart even just a little.

"For a moment, I lost my mind. I am truly sorry. And I won't ever dare betray you again, " she vowed.

She clung to Edward's leg, pleading, "I really regret my behavior and actions. I know I was wrong. But I am sorry for it now. Please give me a chance, Edward."

But her husband would not be pacified. "Get away from me!" he shouted.

He was so disgusted about what she had done and could not contain his rage, even with her apology.

He went with his emotions and kicked Rachel hard. The impact caused her to fall, and her head slammed into a teapot.

Everyone was taken aback, and no one moved quickly enough to catch Rachel.

There was a loud thump when the head and teapot collided, and soon Rachel's head started to bleed.

She passed out.

The sight of blood spurred Charles into action. He rushed towards her and started to lift Rachel, looking at the others for assistance. Then he barked orders, "We need to get her to the hospital immediately.

Move!"

Autumn moved as quickly as her husband and helped him as he carried Rachel into the car. Edward and Chris followed close behind. Arriving at the hospital, Rachel was rushed into the emergency room. She would need surgery. Edward looked stricken as he stood silently, watching doctors and nurses take care of his wife.

As furious as he was with Rachel for her indiscretion, he truly loved the woman. He married her even against the wishes of his family. He envisioned their union to be peaceful and happy. It was only later when he realized that Rachel was not the simple woman he thought her to be. He now saw she was a wolf hidden behind sheep's clothing. Edward now recalled several reports by servants that Rachel would leave at midnight after he fell asleep.

It dawned on him now that she may have been putting sleeping pills in his water, for how could he not be aware that she was always going out as soon as he fell asleep?

He was jolted back to the present by hearing Chris' voice.

"Don't worry, Dad. She'll be all right."

Edward managed a sad smile, and then patted Chris on the arm. "I'll be fine."

He was now worried that if something terrible happened to Rachel, she would use it as an excuse to

keep pestering Chris and make more trouble for his daughter.

Chris was his only child and he would do everything to protect her from Rachel or anyone else who would try to harm her, even if he had to pay a heavy price for his actions.

Autumn interrupted the father and daughter. "Chris, let's get your hand treated first, " she said pulling her towards the nurse station.

She remembered Chris had cut her hand back at Edward's house and worried it could get infected. "It needs to be cleaned and treated."

But Chris insisted her injury was nothing serious. "Really, I'm okay, " she assured Autumn.

Inspecting the wound, she said, "It's just a small cut. See, it's already stopped bleeding."

Chris ignored her wound and only wanted to stay with her father and comfort him.

Edward felt guilty about hurting Chris, even if it was unintentional. He agreed with Autumn that it needed to be seen by a medical personnel. "Chris, you need to have that treated. It was bleeding a lot earlier. I'll be fine, and Charles is here with me anyway, " he gently told his daughter.

Now that she was outnumbered, Chris agreed to be seen by a nurse. She felt pain shoot up her arm as

it was being sterilized with antiseptic. Fortunately, the cut wasn't so deep and would not require stitches.

After her wound was wrapped in gauze and secured by medical tape, Chris went out with Autumn to buy food. Eating was forgotten since the couple got off the plane and it was already past dinner time.

They would most likely stay at the hospital until very late, so food and coffee were necessary. On the way back to the hospital, Chris still looked so unhappy that Autumn tried to assure her.

"Take it easy, Chris. Don't worry too much about Rachel. I'm sure she'll be fine, " she said.

Chris frowned and said, "I'm not worried about Rachel. It's my father I'm thinking about. What if he can't get past this storm in his life?"

She snarled, "That shameless woman! Why does she keep causing trouble for our family?"

Autumn hugged Chris to console her. Then she looked her in the eye.

"It may look hopeless now, but things always work out in the end. Just cross the bridge when you get there, " she advised Chris.

At the support offered, Chris realized everything that happened only really involved her family. Yet, here was Autumn standing by her. She felt guilty all of a sudden. "I'm so sorry, Autumn, that you've had to be

involved in this, " Chris said.

Charles and Autumn must be tired after a very long trip and instead of resting, she had to drag them to Edward's house to help deal with her father and his wife. "Forgive me for being inconsiderate. You should be resting instead of witnessing all these drama, " Chris apologized.

But Autumn just waved off the apology. "Chris, we're family so there's nothing to worry about. Stop thinking of me as an outsider."

She knew Chris needed the support so she declared, "I am not leaving you alone here. Charles and I would be worried about you."

It just so coincident that Leila was in the hospital at the same time. She had run out of the ointment needed for her injury and was getting her prescription filled. She had no idea Charles was also there and broke into a wide grin when she ran into him.

"Mr. Lu, you're back!" she said happily. Politely, but without emotion, Charles asked, "Why are you here?"

Although he looked at Leila, he was obviously not pleased to see her there and wanted to get away

from her quickly.

"I needed to fill my prescription, " Leila explained while holding up her purchase.

She asked with a big smile, "I heard you and Mrs. Lu went away for your honeymoon. How was your trip? It must have been a wonderful holiday."

Charles spoke briskly to escape Leila. "Uhm, I have an emergency to deal with and have no time to chat. Excuse me, " he said with a hint of impatience.

He saw Leila blush in embarrassment at being dismissed but felt no guilt about his behavior. Charles hurried Leila along saying, "If you've finished your business here, you better go on home."

She was about to say something but sensed Charles' cold reception.

She masked her displeasure over his attitude, and after a short pause, she put on an aggrieved look for Charles' sake.

"Well, I'll see you then at work tomorrow, Mr. Lu."

Charles paid her no attention. Just as Leila turned to leave, she passed by Autumn and Chris who were coming back after buying food and coffee. Briefly, there was a twinge of jealousy, but then Autumn felt foolish for being suspicious about her husband and his secretary in the past. The time spent away with

Charles erased those doubts and she was further assured after seeing her husband's cold treatment of

Leila.

She called out her husband's name.

As Charles turned around, she came forward with a smile and said, "We bought food and coffee. You

must be hungry by now."

She walked past Leila without even looking at the other woman.

Autumn finally came around after being convinced there was nothing going on between Charles and

Leila. She vowed to stop stressing herself out over nothing.

"Thank you, Autumn, for your concern, " he said softly. His manner was in sharp contrast to how he just

treated Leila.

Chris handed Edward a cup of coffee. Tired and haggard, he looked at his daughter and said, "It's late.

You better go home and get some rest. I'll stay and keep watch."

Chapter 395 A Divorce Deal

Chris smiled at her father. "You take it easy, Dad. We're all here for you."

She sat down beside him and gave him a hug of reassurance.

By 10 o'clock, Rachel was out of surgery, although she had yet to wake up from anesthesia. Her forehead was plastered and her face was still pale. Edward asked about his wife and was relieved to be told she was out of danger.

He asked the medical staff who had handled the patient during surgery.

A doctor still wearing surgical scrubs and a mask approached Edward and the rest to report on the outcome of the procedure.

"I handled the operation," said he, after taking off the mask.

An anxious Edward inquired, "Doctor, how is she? When will she wake up?"

The surgeon patted Edward's shoulder to assure him Rachel was in recovery.

"I had to stitch her forehead which was cut open. The stitches will be removed in a few days. But..."

The doctor paused a bit, and then looked at Edward, his face quite serious. "Your wife is pregnant and is already in a delicate state. The accident, unfortunately, put the baby at risk for abortion. I'm sorry," said Rachel's doctor. He explained the patient needed complete bed rest and must not be subject to undue stress, otherwise she would be in danger of losing the child.

Edward shook the doctor's hand and said, "Yes, thank you for taking care of her. And we shall follow

your instructions."

He was getting impatient for the physician to leave. While he appeared to be concerned about Rachel, Edward really wanted nothing to do with her pregnancy. Still, he was asked to see his wife after she woke up and was taken to a room.

Then he turned to those who were with him to ask them to go. "Charles, thank you for your efforts and kindness," Edward said, shaking Charles's hands. "You all go on home to rest. I'll stay behind to be with Rachel."

Chris, however, insisted on staying with her father. "I'll stay here with you to help out."

Edward thought of arguing with his daughter but eventually gave in. "Charles, Autumn, you can go home now and rest. Thank you for being here with us through all this," she said graciously, thanking Charles and Autumn.

Then the couple got up, preparing to leave the hospital.

"We will go ahead," said Autumn. She agreed it wasn't necessary to stay at the hospital and wanted to get home after a long and tiring day. "But call me if you need me, okay?" said she, turning to Chris.

The two women then exchanged a hug.

"I know what to do, " Chris reassured Autumn

After seeing Charles and Autumn off, Chris went back to the ward and saw her father was not there.

She went to look for him and found him by the staircase, smoking. "What are you doing, Dad?" she asked in surprise.

Edward waved off her question. "I need to smoke to relax. Don't worry, I'm all right, " said he.

He thought he could drown his sorrows in cigarettes. If not for Chris' support and company, Edward was almost certain he would be facing a huge scandal once news came out about Rachel's pregnancy.

And it would make handling his estate more difficult.

While puffing, he thought of his earlier impulse to strangle Rachel to protect Chris's shares in the company. But he decided it would not be worth the candle to murder Rachel, however hateful she was.

Having just reunited with Chris, Edward would do anything to protect his daughter and ensure they will have a harmonious relationship.

After watching her father in silence, Chris decided to talk about the situation.

"Dad, how do you want to go about resolving this matter, " she prodded gently.

Leaving Edward alone was not really an option for Chris. Something had to be done to put an end to the scandal caused by Rachel once and for all.

He ran his fingers through his hair, shrugging. "I haven't thought of anything yet," Edward admitted.

He told his daughter that had she not been holding him tightly during his confrontation with Rachel, he may have actually beaten his wife to death.

Chris was shocked at the intensity of Edward's anger. For a moment she was paralyzed by fear

thinking of how things may have ended. Seeing his daughter's stricken look, he quickly reassured

Chris, "You don't have to be afraid. I wasn't going to put you through something traumatic like that."

His daughter shook her head, and then looked at Edward lovingly. "Sometimes, you scare me, Dad. I

sincerely hope you will never do anything beyond redemption. You must control your impulses. And

please cherish our bond because I am loath to lose you," she said lengthily.

Edward could no longer control his tears while listening to Chris. He gave her an affectionate hug and

said, "My dear daughter, I promise that I will control my temper and won't act on impulse in the future."

Pleased with her father's response, Chris steered the conversation to Edward's marriage. "Since you're

not the baby's father, how do you plan to handle the situation with Rachel?" she inquired.

She herself could offer no solutions, but she was curious how her father would handle the problem.

At a loss for words, Edward simply shook his head. "I haven't thought of anything effective.

However, I am considering divorcing her," he admitted to his daughter.

The determination in her father's voice made Chris shudder. Divorce may be the best idea to deal with

the marriage between Edward and Rachel following her cheating.

"Are you sure divorce is the answer?" she asked politely.

"Oh definitely! What other recourse is there?" he replied.

Edward stubbed his cigarette and threw it in the trash. He grimaced and added, "I can tolerate most

anything...

But not lies and deceptions. Rachel must be taught an important lesson for her unforgivable betrayal."

"Oh, Dad..." Chris sighed.

She hated seeing her father unhappy and consumed by hatred.

But Chris had a very soft spot in her father's heart. So he said, "You can rest assured I will not commit

anything silly or tragic."

He was suddenly gaining perspective and it was becoming clearer how he wanted to punish Rachel.

Edward knew Rachel married him to raise her status in society and to get back at Charles. 'If I divorced her, she would be hugely disappointed and in a state of misery, ' Edward thought.

He was soon on the phone speaking to his lawyer whom he instructed to draft a divorce agreement.

One stipulation was the withdrawal of the hotel that he previously offered to Rachel.

The next day, he took advantage of the fact that Chris left to buy breakfast and presented Rachel with the divorce papers. His wife touched her belly hoping to stir some sympathy from Edward. But he only sneered at her. "Stop using that child as a pawn. You're pathetic!"

With her head still in pain and Edward's cruel words, Rachel was soon in tears and desolate. Looking at her husband, she sobbed.

"You should have asked the doctor to just abort the pregnancy!"

"But I have nothing to do with that baby. It is your baby, " he said harshly.

The pregnancy was simply a reminder of Rachel's betrayal and it made him furious again.

"Since you're awake, go over the divorce settlement carefully and sign the papers, " Edward ordered.

He tossed the documents over to Rachel, almost loath to touch her.

She thought Edward was just kidding about the divorce. When she caught the papers, she was

overcome with fear and shock after seeing "Divorce Agreement" written on top of the page. She looked

at her husband and asked incredulously, "Are you really going to divorce me?"

"Woman, you deserve it!" he almost shouted.

It pained him to call his lawyer to draw up the divorce papers. He thought about it over and over again.

In the end, he knew the only solution was to end his relationship with Rachel. "Your betrayal and

deception are unacceptable and caused me severe distress. Nothing but a divorce will satisfy me, " he

said emphatically.

Rachel tried to change Edward's mind once more.

"Edward, I admit my mistake. I wasn't thinking at that time. But please forgive me and give us another

chance..." said she, speaking softly and humbly.

Chapter 396 Shameless

"Enough! Let go of me, " Edward cried out, trying to wriggle out of Rachel's hold. After struggling for a

moment, Edward threw off her hand in exasperation. "I know you are using this child to take advantage

of me and get back at Charles. But let me tell you, there's no way I'm going to let you get away with it, "

he said, words laden with threat.

"I don't want to know whose child you're carrying right now, neither do I care. Just sign the divorce papers while I'm still asking nicely. Do you understand?"

"Edward, don't forget you're kind of a big deal in Y City. We've just been married not so long ago. If we get divorced now, the news will surely get around. Aren't you afraid the effect it will have for you?"

Rachel asked, trying to change his mind.

"Edward, please don't do this. I'll listen to you in the future no matter what happens. I'll abort this baby if

that's what it takes. I'll do anything for you!" Rachel begged.

"Stop! I don't want to hear your excuses anymore!" Edward said, refusing her request.

"It's over between us. I might be a man who cares about dignity but I'd rather take the chance than

living with a woman like you. And don't you forget, you're also a public figure. You're a celebrity for

Christ's sake! If your affair comes to light, not only will you be disgraced, but your career will also be ruined, " he told her the stakes.

"So what are you waiting for?" he asked, raising his eyebrows.

"Sign the papers now!"

"Why are you doing this?! Are you really going to be so hard on me?"

Rachel yelled miserably.

She suddenly felt that the man in front of her was very strange. She realized he had definitely changed.

He wasn't the same person who promised to take care and love her all his life. "Have you forgotten

what you said at our wedding?! Have you forgotten your vows?!"

"How dare you mention that? Do you know how disgusted I am of what you've done?" Edward

exclaimed, glaring at Rachel.

"I admit that I did love you very much, and I did promise to take care of you for the rest of our lives. But

what about you? What have you done as my wife? I am indeed much older than you, and you might

refuse to marry me if you minded it. But you married me and you must keep your words. After all, who

would want an unfaithful wife?"

"I promise I'll never cheat on you again, " Rachel said, pleading.

"I know that I've gone too far and it was really foolish of me. If you give me another chance, I will never

do that again."

"No matter what you say, I won't change my mind. We're done, " Edward said firmly.

"Sign it now, or I'll have my lawyer file a divorce suit against you tomorrow. Weigh it out for yourself."

Throwing Rachel a mocking glance, he went on. "You have the father of your child. You can go straight to him after you sign it. I think he'll be the one responsible for you and your child."

His words immediately reminded her of Roger. But who was he kidding? He would always just be a boy toy who she could goof around with, but never truly be with as a partner.

Knowing that Edward had made up his mind and would not change it no matter what happened, she realized that she had no choice but to bargain. "I'll sign the paper in one condition."

"What is it?"

Edward asked, indifferent.

"We need to split your property equally and that means I'll take half of it."

Edward was stunned upon hearing her words. They had only been together for about two months, but she already had the gall to take half of his property. She really was demanding too much that it had become extremely ridiculous.

"Why don't you just say that you want all my dad's property?" Chris, who just returned after buying breakfast, ironically asked, "How can you ask to take half his property? Are you really that shameless?!"

Irritated, Rachel responded in return, "But I'm his wife!"

"And since the gloves have already come off, I don't have to hide my purpose anymore. I will divorce you only if you give me half of your fortune. Take it or leave it."

"I see, " Edward said, contemplating.

"You've finally decided to show your true colors, huh?" he continued, standing up. "Since we cannot reach an agreement, there is no need for us to do so. Tomorrow, I will send my lawyer here. He will be fully responsible for the divorce. You want half the property? In your dreams!"

With that, he turned and walked away, leaving Rachel staring at his back.

After a few moments, Edward and Chris decided to leave. When Chris got home, she soon discovered that Charles had already gone to work, leaving Autumn at home. "How did it go with Rachel? Is she alright?" Autumn asked as soon as she saw Chris.

"Oh she's alright, couldn't be better, " Chris replied, sarcasm clear in her voice.

"I'll tell you what happened. When my dad asked Rachel to sign the divorce papers this morning, she asked for half of his property. Could you believe it?!"

"Really? She did that?!" Autumn gasped.

She almost couldn't believe her ears after hearing Rachel's outrageous request.

"Yeah, you heard me right, " Chris confirmed, getting angrier. "Fortunately, my dad was able to come to his senses this time. Instead of giving in, he threatened to sue her for divorce. Rachel's surely gonna be screwed this time."

"That's nice to know. She deserves it, " Autumn sighed.

That afternoon, she had an appointment at a teahouse with Roger, who was polite enough to arrive early.

Satisfied by being introduced to two excellent television crews, he gained more respect for Autumn.

As Autumn sat down, Roger spoke and went straight to the point, "Mrs. Lu, why did you ask to meet?"

"Have you heard about Rachel?"

Autumn asked in return.

"Well, she called this morning to tell me that Edward was infertile and he was forcing her to sign a divorce. She claimed that I was the father of her baby and therefore I should be responsible for the child. She yelled at me over the phone when I didn't answer, " Roger calmly answered as he poured Autumn a cup of tea. "It's fine though, it's not like I'm not used to it. And it's not my loss anyway."

Roger knew Rachel was no longer useful to him so it was fairly easy to stop caring about her as a person.

"Hey, I have a question, " Autumn said, nudging Roger.

"Have you ever wondered how it would affect you if Rachel kept the baby?" she asked out of curiosity.

"I... " Roger stammered, his face displaying a little frown. The thought of Rachel keeping the baby never crossed his mind. He always thought she was so selfish that she wouldn't do anything that wouldn't prove to be of benefit.

"What do you mean by that, Mrs. Lu?"

Roger asked, clearly taken aback by the question.

"I just wanted to warn you that Rachel might use this as a threat against you. If that happens, what are

you going to do about it?"

Autumn inquired further.

Chapter 397 Do Whatever It Takes

Roger frowned and considered what was being asked of him. "It's impossible, " he finally said.

"Yes, I'm an actor, but I'm not as popular as she is. I don't see how Rachel will benefit by being linked to me, " Roger pointed out.

Autumn nodded. "Yes, you may not be as popular, but..."

Her eyes bore into him as she spoke. "After several months, it's very likely you'll be famous by the time the two TV shows where you play roles in are shown. And Rachel, who has nearly nothing, will think you are her last hope to recover what she lost."

Confused, Roger raised his hands to show that he was still clueless.

"So, what should I do now?" he asked.

Autumn was wondering if he finally understood her deviousness.

She smirked as he tried to absorb what she was thinking. Autumn made it a point never to hurt others unless they hurt her first. Rachel had already caused too much trouble and it was time to do something so the woman could not hurt her again.

Then she told Roger, "Of course you can do something. However..."

Autumn paused for effect. "You have to do whatever it takes, no matter what the cost."

Her words may have been vague but the message was clear and Roger understood. Autumn stood up

to leave and said, "I've said enough. I leave it up to you, including whether you will or will not do it."

She gave him a daring look, and the latter formulated a plan in his head.

Roger suddenly remembered the photographs he was in possession of. Autumn was right. Once he

became famous because of the TV shows, Rachel's recourse would be to blackmail him, and that

would definitely destroy his career and maybe his life. If he wanted to prevent the woman from

harassing him, he had to act first.

He decided to call a reporter from Entertainment Weekly. Roger went straight to the point.

"I have some photos that you might be interested in, " he offered.

The following day, photos of Rachel and Roger were splashed on every tabloid, magazine and online.

In it was Rachel, in all her naked glory, a complete contrast to the virtuous image she had projected for

many years.

Publishing the photos achieved two things: it destroyed Rachel as was intended, and it made people curious about the handsome guy she was with.

Someone eventually recognized Roger as an actor playing supporting roles in two TV shows they were filming. So the shows became a hot topic for the public, thanks to the unsolicited publicity.

The director was only too happy for it. The photos may have been scandalous for Roger, but people started recognizing the actor and became interested in his shows. Besides, it was a known fact that

Roger was close to the Lu family, so no one dared to cause him any trouble.

As expected, Roger's popularity grew as a result of the scandalous photos.

Although many of the online comments were somewhat cruel, it still made people more aware of him.

As an actor, the greatest tragedy was for no one to be talking about you.

No one was happier than Roger's assistant. "You've become a real celebrity now! And everyone is talking about you," he told his boss.

He handed Roger coffee while excitedly sharing the news about people's reactions to the scandalous item.

But Roger merely sneered. People were talking about the photos but the topic wasn't as hot as he

expected it to be. He knew that an actor needed more than scandals to be talked about. It was more important to reverse the bad reputation it created for him.

Autumn was right. He should never give Rachel a chance to blackmail him and end his career before it took off.

So he decided to ride on Rachel's infamy and use it to his advantage.

Meanwhile, Rachel's world was crumbling. The photos with Roger had destroyed her carefully created image. At the hospital, she was blocked by reporters wanting to interview her. She tried calling Roger to ask for help, but only his assistant answered. "I'm sorry. Roger is busy working now. I'll make sure to give him your message," she was told.

She hung up, furious, struggling to think about her next move.

Unknown to her, Roger had arranged for a press conference where he promised to answer all the media's questions.

Since Rachel was known as Edward's wife, reporters flocked to his home hoping to get a comment from the man. The media swarmed his house, blocked his gate and made it impossible to evade them.

Aware of why they were there, Edward decided to talk so they would stop hounding him.

He cleared his throat before speaking to the many phones and microphones thrust in his face. "About

Rachel, I know nothing about the photos that came out, " he began. "Our marriage has come to an end

and we are now working on the details of our divorce. Once that has been finalized, I will speak about it

more.

For now, I have nothing to say about her, " Edward finished.

A reporter shouted out a question.

"Mr. Lu! Are you divorcing Rachel because of the scandal that came out recently?"

Edward shook his head and answered, "No. We had already decided to divorce before the scandal

came out. As to the details of the divorce, I don't think it is the time or place to talk about them."

He paused, considering, and added, "I feel lucky to have made this decision before all this happened

because no man, I am certain, could bear seeing his wife's nude photos splashed on the Internet and

media."

Edward gave a sad smile. "That's all I have to say. I will answer all your questions after everything is

finalized. Until then, please give me some time, " he appealed.

Another reporter attempted, "Mr. Lu, one more question?"

Edward fought his way into his car and was about to drive off but reporters kept blocking him.

He ignored them and at the first opportunity drove away as fast as he could.

Meanwhile, the press conference arranged by Roger was starting. He arrived promptly to get a feel of the situation. As expected, reporters were curious about his relationship with Rachel and threw a barrage of questions at him.

One asked, "Mr. Han, can you tell us how you and Miss Bai met and ended up together?"

Seated on stage, Roger tried to appear relaxed and smiled as he answered, "We met at a cocktail party. I was a fan of hers and thought she was inaccessible to people like me. But after talking with her, I learned she was really just a quiet, shy girl. We shared similar characteristics and hobbies so it became natural for us to be together."

Then he went straight to the scandal. "As for the photos, I have no idea who took them and exposed them to the public." He hardened his eyes and vowed, "I will do my best to find out who did it and let him take responsibility."

The second question asked was, "Can you tell us when you and Miss Bai started your relationship and when it ended?"

Roger sat up straighter before replying carefully. "Our relationship was over before she got married.

And because she is another man's wife now, I hope not to bother her anymore. We broke up a long time ago, for reasons that we have kept between us. I just want to apologize to her about telling our story, and discussing such a personal matter in public."

Chapter 398 The Boss-Employee Relationship

More drama was needed, Roger thought. So he stood up, bowed deep and said, "While I had to admit to a romantic relationship with Miss Bai, I will make it clear it was in the past. I am now appealing to the public to please respect her privacy, especially her married life even if we, as artists, are susceptible to gossip. While publicity is good for my TV shows and help people recognize me as an actor, I would appreciate not hearing baseless comments about my private life."

But the press wanted to know more. "Did you know that Miss Bai and her husband Edward Lu are getting a divorce and he wants to divorce her?" a reporter inquired.

Ever the actor, Roger pretended to be stunned by the news. "But why? I've long ended my relationship with Miss Bai so it can't be the reason for their parting," he said.

Roger sought out a camera, looked directly into it and said, "Edward, I know we have never met. But I want to sincerely apologize for any trouble I may have caused your marriage. And while Miss Bai and I have parted a long time ago, I will not blame you for whatever actions you may take regarding the matter."

His admission was well accepted and gained him more recognition that was very good for his TV shows. And the media began to shift their attention from gossiping about Roger's private life to his acting career.

Rachel, however, was furious over Roger's claims made during the press conference. She hurled everything within reach and shattered every breakable item in sight. The nurse who came in was appalled at the mess and expressed her displeasure. "Miss Bai, this is a hospital. You have no right to behave that way!"

But the patient was raving mad and screamed, "Out of my sight!"

She pointed at the nurse and menacingly said, "Get out of here!"

But the nurse would not be cowed. "This is our hospital, a public facility, and not your house or private

room. We will not tolerate smashing hospital property!"

Unfortunately, the nurse was well aware of the scandal Rachel was involved in and looked at the woman contemptuously. "Whatever issues you have does not justify your behavior."

But Rachel was unstoppable. "How dare you speak to me that way!"

She sneered and assumed a more superior attitude. "What gives you the right to disrespect me?"

With Roger's announcement and Edward's decision to divorce her, all Rachel wanted to do was hide in the hospital to avoid facing the media and the public.

The nurse said testily, "I treat every patient with sincerity and respect.

But in your case, Miss Bai... you had better arrange to be discharged as you have obviously recovered."

Rachel snapped at her, "I am not leaving!"

She was now crying but still hostile. "I can afford another day's hospitalization, " Rachel sobbed.

The nurse looked at her with disdain and said, "This is not a hotel where you can stay as long as you want.

Our hospital serves patients in urgent need. Those who have recovered need to be discharged,

regardless of whether they can afford to pay or not, " she stressed.

Rachel saw that the nurse was unmoved by her appeal and remained adamant about her being discharged.

Roger's arrogance during his press conference made things more complicated for Rachel. She decided there was only one way to stay in the hospital, however difficult the decision was.

She announced, "I want to undergo induced abortion. Is that justification enough to stay?"

With Roger denying any romantic relationship, keeping the baby didn't seem worth it.

Regarding that the nurse was startled by the announcement, she showed no sign of it.

Instead she asked routinely, "Are you sure you want to do that?"

Rachel sighed a little but was resolute about her decision. "I have thought this through. I am left with no choice but to end this pregnancy, " said she.

In her mind, she knew no one would claim the baby and it would only be subjected to torment if born into the world.

"And when do you want to undergo the operation?" the nurse asked.

"As soon as possible!" Rachel quickly replied.

Loneliness is said to be categorized into ten grades.

Going through an operation without any support is perhaps among the most unbearable, and Rachel knew this was her plight.

What would become of her, undergoing an abortion with no family caring for her?

Meanwhile, Leila was extremely pleased to be working with Charles again at Shining Company. She brought in a document for his signature. But after signing the papers, he tossed it back to Leila and ordered, "Close the door when you leave."

Leila composed herself despite his rude behavior.

"Mr. Lu..." she began, coming closer to Charles. "I need to talk to you about something."

Charles looked up, with a look of disdain and indifference, and asked, "What do you want?"

Leila could sense Charles' impatience, so she quickly defended herself.

"I learned about the rumor of an office romance between us when I came back to work and I am worried. I've tried my best to downplay it and you have to know I had nothing to do with spreading it.

Please believe me that I would never betray you, " she pleaded.

Leila went on, "Although I made an official and timely statement to refute this baseless claim, our colleagues continue to gossip about it. Mr. Lu, I hope you will not stay away from me on the basis of this preposterous rumor."

She hoped her plea was convincing enough for Charles.

And he replied with utmost composure. "You have so many suspicions, and that's not healthy, " said

Charles. "What you would say is a normal relationship between a boss and an employee? And why do you think I would alienate you?"

Charles was only too grateful to David for warning him about Leila. Otherwise, he might have fallen for her ploy. Right now, his impulse was to fire Leila.

But he was aware there was nothing to justify such a decision.

"Mr. Lu, I think you misunderstood what I was saying, " said Leila.

She tried to explain, "I consider it an honor to work with you, and I am satisfied with the work I do. I simply ask for some time to put an end to this endless gossip."

Charles slapped his hand on the desk. "Okay, enough of defending yourself."

His aversion to Leila apparent, Charles remarked, "Whether it's rumor or fact, we'll just let it pass. Time will prove it wrong or right. Actually, it does not bother me at all. I hope you will continue with your excellent work for the company and just forget all that talk."

Slightly embarrassed, Leila replied, "Thank you, Mr. Lu. I understand what I have to do."

As she turned to leave, Leila felt burning hatred for Autumn. All her efforts to seduce and get close to

Charles were for nothing. She now realized the man was even more indifferent to her than before.

Chapter 399 The Verdict

Leila played one last card. "Ah, Mr. Lu? Will you be attending the dinner party tonight?" she asked.

The dinner was in honor of an important client. During similar occasions in the past, Charles always

had her accompany him. And she was hoping he would do the same this time around. Every chance to

be with Charles was precious for her.

She was surprised when Charles, after considering briefly, said no. Frowning, he told Leila, "Ask David

to go with you. I have something else to attend to this evening."

Crestfallen, Leila said, "Okay."

She would have complied with whatever Charles decided. She thought, 'It's foolish to insist on Charles

attending tonight. He's already suspected I started the rumor about our inappropriate relationship.' As

she turned to leave, she decided, 'I need to stay under the radar in the meantime. Otherwise, I may lose my job.'

Walking out of Charles' office, Leila was now livid. But she remained calm not wanting to show her distress. Anger was useless. If her co-workers saw she was infuriated, they would only make fun of her.

And the worst was the possibility of losing her job all because of her desire for the boss.

Charles left the office early and gave notice he was not returning for the day. He went to Autumn's office to pick up his wife. Since they had yet to visit Autumn's family after getting back from their honeymoon, the couple agreed to visit and join the Zhao family for dinner.

"Grandma!" Autumn greeted Emily excitedly when they arrived.

Abby, meanwhile, pulled Charles aside and whispered, "How are things going with your secretary?"

Charles quickly assured her. "Please don't worry, Aunt Abby. I have no feelings for her, and I will never betray Autumn," he promised. Abby looked him in the eye, saw that he meant every word and remarked, "You better not."

She didn't trust Charles and wanted to hear his sentiments about the matter.

"I'm telling you, if you do anything to hurt Autumn, I will show you no mercy, " she warned, her tone deadly serious.

"I know, " Charles replied.

He was aware Autumn's family, including Abby, was just protective of his wife and did not mind the distrust.

Autumn spied the two huddled in a corner and went up to them. "What are you two talking about?"

She looked from Charles to Abby. "Why so sneaky, hmm?"

It was Abby who answered. "It's nothing. We're just catching up."

There was absolutely no need for Autumn to know about Leila's attempts to seduce Charles, Abby thought.

"We were only discussing Cindy's education, " Charles explained to his wife with a smile.

"Oh, yes. Where is Cindy?" Autumn asked, looking around.

"I don't see her around, " she frowned slightly.

Abby patted Autumn's arm. "Cindy is with her grandparents."

She added, "They missed her so we asked her to visit them at home and spend time there." Abby

turned to look at the dining table and announced, "Dinner is ready."

Every time Autumn visited the Zhao family there was always a feast laid out for her. Amy had always been grateful that her son left them a pretty granddaughter. Autumn's presence made it easier to deal with the grief of losing her son Bowen. She enjoyed cooking for Autumn.

During dinner, Arthur talked about Wendy. The topic, of course, upset Autumn, whose face turned a bit dark. Lowering her head, Autumn thought, 'Why is my grandfather talking about Wendy? I'm married now and starting a new life with Charles. And I've been quite busy lately, yes, but I wish he didn't bring Wendy up.'

Autumn did not miss Wendy at all, considering all that she did to her daughter. 'What she did to me does not deserve respect,' she thought.

"We are having dinner. Why did you have to bring up that bitch and spoil our appetite!" Amy snapped at Arthur.

She had seen the change in Autumn's face prompting her to admonish Arthur. "It's okay, Grandma, "

Autumn assured Abby. Then forcing a smile, she looked at her grandfather.

"What happened to her?" she inquired.

"The verdict was handed down, " he said, looking at Autumn to see her reaction. His granddaughter was so shocked that she dropped her chopsticks on the floor. Concerned, Charles picked them up and asked his wife, "Are you all right?" Abby set another pair of chopsticks on Autumn's plate.

She took a deep breath before replying, "I'm fine, Charles."

Autumn shook her head slightly and turned to Arthur. "What was the verdict?"

Arthur had no intention of telling Autumn what would become of Wendy. The woman was responsible for his son's death, and everyone in the family hated her. But...

Wendy was still Autumn's biological mother. And there was this fear that she might still fantasize about her mother, or a mother's love, so he decided it would be better to let her know the court's decision.

And whatever Autumn decided to do after, he would respect her decision.

"Wendy committed a serious crime. And she has been sentenced to death, " he said.

"I guess... she will be executed soon, " Arthur added.

He looked at his granddaughter with concern. She appeared calm, but he was certain that she was controlling her emotions.

Autumn finally had the courage to speak. "What about..."

"Yvonne?" Arthur supplied.

Autumn nodded slowly.

"Well, she was named an accomplice, and was given a two-year prison sentence, " Arthur said.

He now felt terrible after breaking the news. "Autumn, I have to tell the truth. Wendy was responsible for your father's death. With Aron's help, we managed to add aggravating circumstances. There was no way I was letting her get away with killing Bowen, " Arthur said bitterly.

He looked Autumn in the eye, watching her face. "If you hate me for doing that, it's okay. I understand and accept that. But I do not regret, nor will I apologize for what I did, " he said.

With a pained smile, Autumn reached out to Arthur. "Grandpa, what are you talking about? How can I ever blame you?" she said gently.

It was Arthur who was now in disbelief. "You don't blame me?"

He looked at Autumn and saw how serious she was.

"So, do you want to see her? If you wish to say goodbye, I can..."

Autumn interrupted her grandfather, "No, I have nothing to say to her."

She paused, carefully choosing her words. "She deserves to be punished for the terrible things she did.

No, I don't want to see her."

Sighing, Autumn added, "I hope that in her last days, she can reflect about her life and the things she's done that destroyed people's lives."

But Autumn knew her mother well. Reflection was not in her nature. Instead, she would likely be complaining about her daughter's seeming unconcern and Aron's calling the police. 'She may even grumble about how Simon's death caused her to suffer a lot. It's nearly impossible for her to blame herself for her tragic fate,' Autumn thought.

That was why she felt it was useless to see her mother, even for the last time.

Autumn thought, 'The most I can and will do, after her execution, is to give her a proper funeral. So there is no need for me to see her in prison.'

Arthur held his granddaughter's hand. "If you really think this is what's best, I respect that. But just in case you change your mind before the execution, tell me so I can make arrangements," he offered.

Personally, he did not want mother and daughter to meet, too.

Autumn nodded.

Learning about the verdict changed Autumn's mood. Although she tried to dismiss her bad spirits, it was impossible for her to stop thinking about the verdict. After she and Charles left the Zhao family,

Charles inquired, "Why don't you want to see her?"

Inside the car, Autumn sat still, not hearing her husband's question. Her thoughts were running in

different directions. When she snapped back to the present, she realized Charles was asking about

Wendy. She turned to a more comfortable position before replying, "I don't think there's a need to see her."

She stared out the window, eyes sad, before continuing, "I can tell you what she'll say in my sleep.

First, she will ask me to save her from prison. Next, she'll blame me or Aron or someone else for her

fate. She definitely feels she was unfairly treated. But not once will she consider her behavior. So, if I

go see her, I am only looking for trouble. And I do not like to be shouted at while there."

Truth was, had it been any other person but Wendy in prison, Autumn would not think twice about

visiting. But because it was her mother, she would not.

Another realization for Autumn was, she actually felt relieved that Wendy would be executed as retribution for her crime.

Chapter 400 Nancy Is Injured

Charles stared at his wife and remarked, "You have really changed, Autumn." He paused briefly, and then continued with his observation. "If it were the old Autumn, you would have asked to see Wendy immediately. You used to trust her so much and would have begged your grandfather to let her go. But now, your choice is completely different, and the change in you is so evident."

Autumn was eager to know what her husband thought. "But it's a good change for me, right?"

She had already felt the changes in herself.

For one, when Rachel had lost everything, she still convinced Roger to break up with her to further humiliate the woman. She justified her actions thinking there were just people who were like snakes that did not deserve sympathy, because they had a tendency to bite the lifesaver once they recovered.

And to her mind, Rachel was one such snake.

So, Autumn felt no guilt kicking her when she was already down.

Besides, she was really tired of Rachel's constant pestering.

Charles gave his wife a reassuring smile and said, "Honestly, I have to say the changes are very good."

And he added, "Now, I don't have to worry about you being taken advantage of by people because of your kindness."

He was actually referring to Wendy, who often took advantage of her daughter's unconditional love and trust.

During those times, he was wishing for Autumn to be a little more selfish just to protect herself.

While Autumn insisted Wendy and her fate were of no concern to her, she was haunted by nightmares about her mother. So she slept poorly, and dark shadows circled her eyes the next morning. She freshened up, but slumped in the living room waiting for Nancy to serve breakfast.

"Good morning, Autumn, " Nancy greeted her brightly.

"There is soybean milk and porridge for breakfast. What will you be having?"

Still reeling from lack of sleep, Autumn had very little appetite and settled for a little soybean milk and two dumplings that she asked Nancy to prepare.

As she ate the fried dumplings, Autumn asked, "Why don't you prepare milk for me these days?"

Nancy was startled by the sudden question and a funny look flashed across her face. She regained her

composure before replying, "Well, you didn't drink the milk I prepared for you a few days before your travel. And you didn't ask for it after you came back. So, I was thinking you didn't like it anymore. Now you want to have milk again?" she inquired.

Autumn nodded.

Then she explained, "I don't sleep well without drinking milk. So I think I will have it again every night."

Curious but not wanting to pry, Nancy remarked, "All right, I will prepare milk for you from tonight on.

By the way, how are the dumplings?"

Autumn gave a small smile and said, "They're delicious. Thank you."

After a few more minutes, she announced, "I am full now. Thank you. And I have to get to work. So goodbye."

Except for Gary, everyone went to work by noon, so Nancy didn't have much to do. But just as Autumn arrived at a restaurant where she was meeting Isla for lunch, she noticed a commotion in the street.

Some burly men had blocked a woman's path and suddenly began dragging her away. Autumn caught a glimpse of the woman in distress and it appeared to be Nancy.

She tried to catch up with the group, but was not fast enough. By the time she got there, they were

gone.

Autumn returned to the restaurant, sat down and kept looking outside. Isla, who had ordered, was puzzled at her friend's behavior.

"What's wrong, Autumn?" she asked while handing her the menu.

"I thought I saw someone I knew, " she replied.

But it bothered her that the place where she saw the men and Nancy was suddenly cleared of people.

"Never mind, " she said, thinking she had made a mistake.

Straightening herself, Autumn saw the huge diamond ring on Isla's finger.

"Isla... what is this?" she blurted out in excitement, lifting Isla's hand.

"Oh my God! Aron has asked you to marry him, hasn't he?" she nearly shrieked.

Isla lowered her head slightly, and then replied, "Yes!" When she looked up, Autumn noticed the radiance in her face. "I almost freaked out. We were out on a date last night. He suddenly knelt down in front of me while everyone having dinner started to look at us. I was so embarrassed, " Isla narrated.

Autumn could not help but smile.

"Embarrassed? Not touched by the gesture?" she teased.

Isla let out nervous laughter. "Of course I was touched, too. I had mixed feelings, you know..."

But I was really speechless with his proposal. And the people around us kept encouraging me to accept, so I said yes!" Isla kept thinking about the incredible evening and how excited she felt. She told Autumn that in her excitement, she hardly remembered how the ring got on her finger.

"That's wonderful! Congratulations, Isla, " Autumn beamed at her friend.

It was so hard not to feel happy for Isla or share in her excitement. "So, have you set a date for the wedding yet?"

Isla shook her head but continued to smile.

"Not yet. It will have to be discussed between our families. I did tell my parents about the proposal. And they're supposed to sit down with Aron's grandparents in the next few days to talk about it. We'll decide on the wedding date then, " she explained.

According to custom, it was the man's family that should go to the woman's home to discuss wedding arrangements. But since Aron's grandparents were already quite old, it was decided by Isla and her parents to go to Aron's house instead so the elders would not have to be inconvenienced.

"I better be the first to know when that wedding will be, " Autumn demanded excitedly.

She was happy that people she cared about were having their turn at happiness by finding suitable partners.

First Chris, now it was Isla's turn.

"Of course you'll be the first to know, " Isla assured her.

Their orders arrived and Autumn and Isla ate and talked and enjoyed their time. They had been through many challenges together, which only strengthened their bond as friends. It was heartening to know they continued to support one another.

With the Spring Festival coming, Charles came home early each day. And Autumn could not be

happier. She felt life was getting better and their relationship more comfortable. Autumn invited Chris to

go shopping with her for New Year's goods after dinner.

When Autumn got home, the first thing she saw was Nancy, her face all black and blue. Immediately concerned, she rushed to her and asked, "What happened, Nancy?"

Keeping her head down to hide her face, Nancy mumbled, "It's nothing."

She had thought of what to tell Autumn. "I fell down while buying vegetables. Don't worry, it's nothing serious and it will get better in a few days, " Nancy assured.

"Are you sure?" Autumn insisted. Nancy looked awful, she thought.

"I think you'd better see a doctor, " Autumn said.

She was worried the injuries looked more serious than what Nancy claimed.

"Really, Autumn, I'm okay. Stop worrying, " Nancy said.

She dodged the hand that Autumn reached out to check her face. "Dinner is ready. Go and wash your hands, " Nancy ordered. She went to set the table.

As Nancy turned, Autumn stared at her back, recalling what she witnessed earlier at lunch.

She tried to imagine whether the woman was really Nancy.

Nancy had been the family's housekeeper for most of her life. If it was her that she had seen earlier,

how could she be involved with those people, Autumn wondered.

As she was pondering, Charles entered the room, and gave his wife a warm hug. He noticed the worry on her face and asked, "What's the matter?"

You've been standing here for a while. What are you thinking about?"

Autumn wanted to share her thoughts with Charles but decided it was not appropriate. First, she wasn't even sure whether it was Nancy that she saw, and if it really was her, it was none of her business.

"I was waiting for you, " she lied. "You seem to be a little late today."

Charles sighed.

"Well, it's the end of the year. And I have a pile of work to finish. Plus, I got stuck in traffic coming home, " he answered.

Autumn pulled at him. "Come on, wash your hands so we can eat."

Then she added, "Oh, I'm going to buy fruits and snacks for the Spring Festival after dinner with Chris.

You want to join us?"

Charles smiled but shook his head.

During dinner, Charles also noticed the bruises on Nancy's face and began inquiring as Autumn did.

Nancy gave him the same answers. He frowned at them, unbelieving.

"Nancy, if you're in trouble, I want to know about it, " he said in earnest.