

Wedded Bride 401

Chapter 401 Colin Targets Isla

Nancy masked her guilt by quickly assuring Charles. "Don't worry about me, Mr. Lu." She paused, inhaled quietly and then said, "I am fine. And I appreciate your concern."

As this went on, Autumn kept silent and focused on eating.

As planned, Autumn left with Chris to shop after dinner. They first went to the supermarket to get nuts and snacks for the Spring Festival. Then they headed to the shopping mall to buy clothes for Gary as a New Year's gift. Autumn regretted not having enough time to get her grandparents in the Zhao family any presents because it was already late. She made up her mind to go out and shop again another day.

Chris could not contain her excitement about the coming celebration. "I am so looking forward to the family reunion on New Year's Eve. We must celebrate with a party! My brother used to buy a lot of fireworks to light up the New Year and it was spectacular watching them rise and bloom in the sky!" she remarked. Autumn shared in Chris' enthusiasm.

"Yes, we absolutely must have a party for the Spring Festival this year. We need to cherish this time together with the family because next year, you're going to spend New Year with Sam's family, " she

told Chris. Autumn was teasing Chris as they loaded the stuff in the car trunk.

Chris blushed in shyness but smiled a bit.

On their way home, they drove by the supermarket and saw Isla who was being harassed by a man they were unfamiliar with. Autumn quickly stopped the car and went over to Isla, in an attempt to protect her friend.

Up close, Autumn saw a man dressed in an expensive suit, who was actually good-looking. But he had ill manners. True to form, the man's eyes glimmered when Autumn came into his sight. "Wow, what a beauty! Tonight must be my lucky night, " he said brashly.

"Autumn! What are you doing here?" Isla cried out. Startled at seeing Autumn, Isla uttered, "This has nothing to do with you, Autumn. Just go, please."

From annoyance, Autumn's mood turned suspicious. "No! I can't leave you here alone, " she declared.

Autumn now stood in front of Isla and warned the man, "You stay where you are." She faced him boldly and added, "Stay away or you will regret it."

With a smirk, the man hissed, "Little beauty, you better not meddle in business that is none of your

concern." He assumed a cockier stance before adding, "I just want to talk to Miss Zhao. There's no need for you to be worried."

Autumn raised her voice, "I said stay away from her!" She continued to glare at the man who kept advancing towards them. Then loudly she said, "How dare you speak to her that way!"

Isla was now pulling Autumn's arm. "Go, Autumn. I can handle this," she pleaded. She was now worried about Autumn being involved in an unpleasant situation. "You can go now. I can take care of myself," she urged.

Chris soon appeared and also stood beside Autumn to shield Isla. She declared, "Don't be afraid, Isla.

We'll protect you and will not leave you alone. No one is going to bully you."

To the man she threatened, "Get away from here. I've already called the police. If you insist on causing trouble here, you won't like where you're going to end up in."

He suddenly looked worried and turned to Isla. "Are they serious? Tell them I'm a cousin, your elder brother. Are you going to let them do that to me?" Colin was actually Aron's cousin. He now seemed a bit anxious after hearing Chris say she had called the police. He was heading to a bar when he ran into Isla, who was leaving the supermarket. Colin hated Aron and saw an opportunity to get back at him by

playing a prank on Isla. Unfortunately, he didn't expect Autumn and Chris to suddenly appear.

"Cousin?" Autumn said. Confused, she looked at Isla waiting for a confirmation.

Isla nodded helplessly and explained, "He is Aron's cousin."

Autumn suddenly remembered Isla mentioning Aron's uncle and his son and had a pretty good idea about Colin's character. Isla described him as cynical and good for nothing. The memory annoyed her more and she threw Colin a look of disdain.

He flashed a look of triumph and taunted Autumn, "Did you hear what she said? We know each other. I am her brother."

"So what?" Autumn shot back. Still standing in front of Isla, Autumn pointed out, "You are Aron's cousin, and Isla is his girlfriend. So why are you badgering her in public?"

Irritated, Colin retorted, "She is just Aron's girlfriend, not his wife." Smirking, he added, "Even if they were married, there is always divorce. Since she is only Aron's girlfriend at the moment, it is within my rights to woo her."

Aghast, Autumn cried, "Shame on you!" Hearing the exchange, Isla turned pale but inside, she was

raging. It was obvious that Colin was just out to make Aron angry, and this was his real purpose behind his non-stop harassment of her.

Isla often came across Colin and when they met, he would badger her to no end until she was terribly annoyed. But Isla had no idea how to stop him.

Their encounters were becoming more frequent so Isla started wondering if Colin inquired about her whereabouts so they would run into each other over and over again. But she remained clueless why Colin wanted to antagonize Aron.

She was just Aron's girlfriend. 'What does Colin want from me?' Isla wondered.

Colin was unstoppable. "Now, why would you think me shameless?" he jeered. With a malicious smile, he declared, "Isla, I fell in love with you at first sight. I am aware you are Aron's girlfriend, but I can't control my deep affection to you. I want to see you everyday. And if you are willing to be with me, I will take good care of you. I am certain you will be happier with me. Trust me."

More arrogant this time, he added, "Lighthouse Company belongs to my grandparents and they will leave it to me in the future. Aron will get nothing. So how can you have a happy life with him? Why don't you break up with Aron and be with me instead. I can definitely give you a better life." Colin

watched for Isla's reaction to his lengthy speech.

But Isla was unimpressed. "Colin, for the last time let me say this." Her eyes hardened, while her cheeks were flushed. "I love Aron and I don't care if he is rich or poor. He is a man of great integrity. He is also kindhearted and those qualities make him a charming man." She paused a bit, looked Colin in the eye, and then continued, "Aron is the complete opposite of you. You're selfish, a hypocrite and loafer! And I love him very much. As for you..."

Isla pointed at Colin before throwing him a look of contempt, "A person like you would never understand the true meaning of love. And I cannot be bothered to try explaining it to you, because you disgust me! Now, please stay away and stop harassing me!"

Colin refused to be defeated. Sarcastically, he remarked, "Such sweet words from the woman. I am certain my cousin will be moved by what you said." He now looked grim but forced a smile, "When Aron becomes a poor wretch someday, I am almost sure you will abandon him without hesitation. So my suggestion is for you to think of your future now while my eyes are still set on you. Otherwise, you might regret it once I lose interest in you."

He waited for a beat and then added, "Then you will lose any chance to be with me. "Consider your options, " he smirked.

Colin's words only angered Isla more and she showed it. "There is no need to worry about me or my future. And that day you expect will never happen!" she spat at him. Giving Colin one last furious look, she turned to Autumn.

"Let's go!" she snapped. Autumn and Chris looked at Colin with scorn, and then left with Isla.

Isla immediately got in the car and slammed the door shut. She was breathing heavily. Concerned,

Autumn said, "I'm sure this isn't the first time Colin has caused you trouble, right?"

Isla nodded sadly. "You're right." But then she assured Autumn, "Don't worry. He won't dare do anything

to me now."

Even as she heard the conviction in Isla's tone, Autumn still worried about her. Then she asked, "Does

Aron know this? Have you told him?"

Chapter 402 Meeting For A Wedding (Part One)

Isla sighed and shook her head. "No, Aron is not aware of this. And I don't want to worry him because

he will try to deal with the situation." She clasped her hands before speaking. "You know Aron is still

dealing with Simon's death. But Colin's family is also causing him trouble. And if he finds out that Colin has been harassing me, I'm afraid he will try to settle the score violently and destroy himself in the process."

Autumn wanted to console Isla, and started to talk but decided to keep quiet. She was thinking only Aron could resolve the matter of Colin hounding Isla, since her friend was helpless in dealing with the situation.

Although Aron may decide to handle things violently, perhaps he can be persuaded to settle it in a civil manner.

Autumn finally spoke up. "Isla, I still think it's better to tell Aron what has been going on so he can think of a way to put a stop to it." As angry as she was over the situation, she was calm as giving her suggestion.

"I know what to do," Isla suddenly blurted out. With a small smile, she said, "Tomorrow my parents will be coming to Y City to discuss my wedding with Aron's grandparents. I'll tell Aron about it then."

"That sounds good," Autumn agreed. She only hoped Isla would really push through with telling Aron.

Autumn escorted Isla to the door of her home just to ensure she was home safe. Nowadays, living a

comfortable life was not a guarantee against facing danger.

At the end of the year, Autumn finished her last proposal and gave orders for her employees to take their annual leave.

She knew taking a break was necessary because they would soon be faced with several big cases when they returned to work after the new year. She wanted all of them to be well rested.

Isla left the office earlier to pick up her parents from the train station. John and Jina wore down jackets that their daughter bought earlier in preparation for the meeting with Aron's grandparents.

With their work at the farm, they rarely dressed up stylishly.

"Dad! Mom!" Isla cried as she ran up to her parents. She was so glad to see them with big smiles as they hugged their daughter. They were also laden with packages, which made Isla feel guilty. "You know it's not necessary to bring me so many things. I have a comfortable and peaceful life here, " she reassured them.

"Ahhh, but dried turnips and freshly-preserved pickles are your favorites, " said Jina. They also brought freshly-picked carrots from the village that were not available in the big city. Then Jina shyly asked,

"Isla, do I look good in this jacket?" She smiled while caressing the sleeves.

"Oh you look very good in it, " Isla told her mother. She escorted them to her car and drove directly to the hotel where Aron and his grandparents were looking forward to meeting them.

As soon as Aron caught sight of Isla and her parents approaching, Aron stood up excitedly to greet the three and his grandparents were equally welcoming.

The impending marriage brought the two families closer together. Joanna especially enjoyed chatting with Jina. As the elders got along, Isla noted how tired Aron looked and was immediately concerned.

"Not been sleeping well?" she asked him softly.

"Maybe, " he replied. But he took Isla's hand in his to reassure her. "It's nothing serious, really. I'm just tired because I stayed up late last night. So don't be worrying about me, " he told Isla.

As food was served, Mike poured out wine, as a sign of respect for John, whom he found to be simple, kind-hearted and easy to get along with.

Mike and Joanna looked at one another and nodded, as each realized how right it was for Aron to be marrying Isla rather than Becky.

Joanna spoke up. "Aron and Isla, I think, are already old enough so they should no longer postpone

their wedding. So I suggest that an auspicious date be selected for it. Do we all agree?" She looked at

Jina and John, expecting a response.

"I wholeheartedly agree," Jina replied. "And that's why we came here to make these arrangements."

She was smiling at everyone.

She was soft-spoken, but there was eagerness in her tone. "Aron is an enterprising man, and we are quite honored to welcome him as our son-in-law. His relationship with Isla may have faced challenges

but I believe they are fated to be together for good." Jina looked at her daughter and said, "It is time to discuss their wedding."

She took out a sheet of red paper from her coat and explained, "I requested a village elder to divine

Aron's and Isla's dates of birth for an auspicious day for the wedding. And he gave a day in May next year as the date. Is this agreeable to all?"

Joanna examined the date neatly brushed on the red paper and nodded her approval. "An auspicious day, indeed," she said to Jina. She was about to bring up the matter of betrothal gifts when she heard

a familiar voice that was certainly not welcome.

Fiona, along with members of her family, spotted the group and walked over haughtily. "Why, is there a party going on here?" she mocked.

She scanned who were in the table, "What brings all of you here?" Joanna rose to question Fiona's arrival, displeasure evident in her face.

She was further annoyed because of their coming without calling beforehand.

Fiona spoke lazily, "Ah, are we not welcome here, Mom?" Turning to Isla's parents, she explained,

"Aron was an orphaned boy and my family raised him. He was treated with care and love like he was our own child. So it is only right that we join the family gathering to discuss his wedding, right?"

To Jina, she said, "I'm awfully sorry for being late."

"That's all right," Jina replied. She felt the tension building around them as Fiona went on with her bitter sarcasm. 'Who is this woman?' she thought to herself.

Too nervous, she pulled Isla close and asked, "My dear, who is that lady? How should I refer to her?"

She was whispering so as not to add to the tension.

"They are Aron's uncle and aunt," Isla explained. She had to calm herself while patting her mother's arm in assurance.

Unfortunately, Colin joined his parents and went up to Isla. "Miss Zhao, we meet again, " said he. It was obvious he was flirting with Isla, much to Aron's dismay.

Colin believed the best way to antagonize his cousin was through his girlfriend because any discomfort felt by Isla would certainly upset Aron.

Isla opted to ignore Colin's behavior. But she could not escape Fiona, who, upon seeing her nephew's betrothed, was drawn to her beauty but was turned off by the rustic manners of her parents, however well-dressed they were.

"I suppose this young lady is Isla, " Fiona said looking at the young woman. She approached Isla, a hypocritical smile on her lips. "You look pretty, " she commented.

Isla nodded and said, "Yes, Aunt. It's me." Isla addressed Fiona the way Aron did, as a sign of respect but which was met with Fiona's contempt. "Miss Zhao, your marrying into the family is still a long way off. You better call me Mrs. Chen... to avoid raising any suspicions, " said she.

Chapter 403 Meeting For A Wedding (Part Two)

"Mind your words!" Mike stared at Fiona in anger. "We are arranging for their wedding. It is justified if Isla calls you Aunt beforehand. I don't see any reason behind you having an issue with that or blaming

Isla for such a lame reason!"

"Dad, " Fiona replied with sarcasm in her voice. "Before Isla gets married and becomes a part of my family, it would have been more courteous on her part to have called me Mrs. Chen. I mean, just to avoid any troubles she may cause to Aron."

Aron snapped back with growing hostility toward Fiona, "My marriage with Isla is my business. It would be much better if you can just refrain from such unjustified and uninvited interference into this."

Nothing but bad would follow on the arrival of Fiona and her family, as Aron expected.

"How dare you?" Fiona was violently angered but unable to give any counter-blow due to the lack of reason.

"No more of such quarrels and disputes over here anymore." Joanna expressed her displeasure to Fiona, "Get out of here or else behave yourself. Stop making a fool of yourself in the presence of our guests."

"Mom, I am speaking out of concern for Aron." Unwilling to rest her laurels in trying to make the situation worse, Fiona urged Joanna, "The reason behind my speaking such unpleasant words is only because Aron is a part of my family. Moreover, Becky comes from an eminent family. She is beautiful

and courteous. She shows much reverence towards you. Indeed a suitable and deserving wife for

Aron."

"Fiona!" Joann shot back, unable to control her anger, "That is absolute nonsense!"

"There is nothing wrong in what I am saying!" Fiona's deliberate arrogance was very much apparent as

she continued, "Becky, I think, is much more suitable for marrying into my family instead of Isla whose

family is of no match to mine in any way."

"Mind your words!" Jina shot back with a sneer, "Since you do not show my family the due respect,

there is no point for us to be in such a party. Isla, let's take our leave!"

Fiona's remarks biting deep into her skin, Jina's immediate impulse was to leave the party with her

daughter.

"Mom, please hold back your anger." Isla tried to pacify Jina and whispered to her ears, "Fiona means

to spoil my wedding. We should stay here to make her fail in her attempt!"

"Mrs. Zhao, please calm down." Aron shot back to Fiona, "I think I am fated to get married to Isla. But,

my dear Aunt, if you consider Becky to be the ideal bride for your family, why don't you let your son

marry her?"

"Aron!" Fiona was violently angered and humiliated by Aron's suggestion.

How dare Aron suggest Becky for her son Colin? Colin was excellent enough to marry a girl with good

appearance, good manners and good family background, but... Becky was far from that!

Becky's family background was suitable for Aron. But she was no match for Colin. And that too after

her failed relationship with Aron.

"Mrs. Zhao, please sit back." Aron helped Jina to the seat and pacified Jina, "I was a poor orphaned

boy. You can completely dismiss anyone who passed them off as my parents."

Aron reverently poured out a cup of water for Jina. "Only Mike and Joanna have the rights to decide

with whom I should get married."

"Aron, please give some room for consideration." Colin finally countered after sitting silently for all this

while, "My parents are elders in our family, worthy of your due reverence! It would be inappropriate for

you to disrespect them!"

Aron completely ignored Colin's disapproval and continued his complaints, "Such elders who wish ill of

their juniors are unworthy of respect."

"Enough of it!" Mike, despairing of the virtue from Colin and his parents, retorted harshly at Fiona, "You will be welcome as felicitators or... removed from here if you continue to misbehave!"

"Father, you are evidently partial to Aron." Fiona did not relent. "I understand, Aron is your daughter's son, however, Colin is closer to you as your grandson. You have lavished your love upon Aron more than Colin. I am coming to warn Aron against someone who may exploit the family's estate, as you and Joanna are too senile to sense it."

Fiona's incessant misbehavior and harsh words aimed at Isla and her family were getting on the nerves for everyone. "If you keep talking nonsense to injure our relationship, I would give Aron all my shares to kill your wild thoughts. Do you want to have a try?" Mike pointed out at Fiona menacingly with a sneer, which finally left her paralyzed and speechless.

Finally, Fiona and her family were silenced by Mike's authoritative presence.

Mike was relieved to see Fiona and her family unable to debate any further. He apologetically held Jina's hands and said, "Awfully sorry for these impolite and casual words of my juniors. I hope you do not take them seriously."

Jina sighed. She could see how hostile Fiona and her family were against Aron which put a big question mark in regards to Isla's bliss. Her heart swelled with the thought of the hardships that Isla and Aron had survived.

With such harsh words hurled upon her daughter, she wouldn't have spared a moment before taking Isla out of that place. But one thing that held her back was Isla's deep love for Aron.

'Anyway, Aron is the man who stands highly in Isla's favor, ' she thought to herself, 'the one and only man in Isla's cherished mind for the past four years.'

"Isla is deemed to be a suitable girl to marry Aron. As far as we are concerned, they have gone through untold difficulties, sharing weals and woes. Now I make a sincere apology to you for the casual remarks of my juniors. I hope you could be tolerant and understanding." Joanna held Jina's hands tight, expressing her sincerity to take Isla as her granddaughter-in-law.

As a mother, Jina could hardly hold her emotions anymore. "I am only concerned about my daughter."

Jina forced a smile and said, "Isla, the apple of my eyes, should not be thought ill without reason. My family, though underprivileged, should stand proof against outside intrusion! How poor my daughter is..."

"Perfectly understandable!" Joanna patted Jina in a gesture of reassurance. "I completely understand your concerns as a mother. I request you to have faith in me. I will treat Isla with the due love and care just like my granddaughter. I assure you that Isla will be protected from any grievances."

"I can place my trust on you." Jina had no recourse but to believe Joanna, but cast a doubtful glance over Fiona and her family, in fear that Isla would be pushed around after marriage in absence of Aron's parents.

Chapter 404 Meeting For A Wedding (Part Three)

"Mom, I can understand you are just worried about me." Isla smiled reassuringly and said, "But you should also have faith on Aron. I know, he will never let me down."

The reassuring words of Isla came as a soothing balm on the wounded heart of her mother. Yet it took Jina a few minutes to gather herself. After she calmed down, Joanna spoke, "It is our family's responsibility to prepare for the wedding. You can just give the list of guests to us. Moreover, if you have any customs need to be complied with, please let us know. We are going to become a family very soon. Please don't hesitate to tell us if you find anything inappropriate on our part."

"Okay." Finally, there was a satisfying smile on Jina's face. The situation became cheerful once again.

All the people at the table began talking harmoniously with each other. The wedding was a much awaited auspicious moment not just for Isla and Aron but for both the families.

Amidst all the cheers and niceties that were being shared among everyone, one soul that was still extremely distressed was that of Fiona. No matter how hard she tried to get along with the happy tide that flowed in the party, she could not stop worrying about the probable outcome of the marriage on her and her son's future. Mike promised a big gift to Aron on his wedding. Fiona guessed that the gift must be Mike's share of the company. Hence she tried with all her might to stop Aron from marrying.

The very thought of Aron living a happy life was unbearable for her.

"Jina, our family can take care of almost everything but... we have no idea about your local customs.

We don't want anything to fall short in our attempt to prepare for your family. I have discussed it with Aron and plan to give you 8.88 million dollars. If you think it is not enough, we can give more. So how do you think about it?" Joanna had discussed it for a long time and chose such a lucky number as the price for Isla's gift. Isla was a very good girl for Aron. The money was just a token to show Aron and his family's respect for her. And she deserved the money.

"Mom, are you kidding?" Fiona let out a scream out of shock, "How could you give her so much money?"

Indeed, 8.88 billion dollars was a great amount of money for Isla's family. They lived in a poor country and had never seen so much money before. When they heard this number, even they were shocked.

But they decided not to accept it all because they didn't need so much.

"Shut up!" Albert pulled Fiona and said in a low voice, "Did you forget what father told us?"

"Let me go!" Fiona disentangled herself from Albert's hand and said, "If I don't say anything, your parents will give all they have to Aron. So I won't listen to you!"

Then she turned to Joanna, "They are so poor. How could you give them so much money? They will never see so much money if you don't give them. Coming from such a poor family, even Isla doesn't deserve so much money. I think... it's enough to give her eighty-eight thousand."

"Shut up!" Joanna was enraged by her words and refuted, "Isla will be my grandson's wife soon, I will not allow you to say such inappropriate words to hurt her feelings!"

"Mom..." Fiona frowned and said, "I am saying this only for our family's wellbeing! The people like Isla and her family do not need so much money! It looks like we are making a business deal with their

family and we buy their daughter in such a hefty price."

Mike was angered beyond words hearing such demeaning words from his daughter-in-law. He threw his chopsticks to the ground out of rage. He shouted at Fiona, "Get out of here. Now! I don't want to see you again!"

"No, I won't!" Fiona sneered, "You once showered all your love and concerns on Colin. But everything has changed ever since Aron came back to this family. You withdrew all your affection from Colin and gave to Aron. You have never treated Colin fairly all these years! Albert stopped me from saying these things to you and I listened to him."

Then she added, "But now both of them have grown up and come to the marriageable age. The money you are going to use for Aron's wedding belongs to Chen family and Colin! How could you use his money without his permission?!"

Fiona insisted that Colin was the rightful heir to all the money that belonged to Mike and Joanna while Aron had no rights to use it.

"Nonsense!" Enraged by her selfish words, Mike screamed at her. Deeply disappointed, he dismissed

her opinion and said, "Both Colin and Aron are my grandsons and I have never treated them unfairly! I have given Colin everything he wanted. Even the apartment you bought recently! You are just too selfish!"

"Colin is your grandson and he deserves that apartment!" Fiona sneered and said, "In a word, I won't allow you to give Isla so much money! That's it."

"I don't need your permission." Mike added, "This is my gift for Isla. It has nothing to do with you."

"I..." Fiona wanted to say more but was interrupted by Mike and Joanna, "Albert, if you still take us as your parents, just take her out of here. I don't want to see her."

Albert looked at Fiona and then at his parents. He fell into a strange dilemma.

He was accustomed to listening to Fiona's opinion on every matter, but he didn't dare do anything against Mike's will especially when Mike was angry. After a long time of consideration, he said to Fiona,

"Let's go."

He never wanted to come to this place to begin with. He came along only because Fiona insisted on doing so.

He didn't think Aron's wedding had anything to do with his or his son's future.

Fiona was utterly disappointed with Albert's cowardness. She accused him, "Coward! What have you done for me since I married you? Nothing! I did all these only for your son! If I don't say anything, your parents will leave all their fortune to Aron. Then you will lose everything!"

"Are you talking about how to divide my property after my death? Remember I'm still alive!" Mike sneered and said to Fiona, "Mark my words to be my last warning to you. If you don't leave right now, I will give nothing to Colin after I die!"

"Grandpa." Colin was distressed by the words of his grandfather. 8.8 million was a meagre amount for the Chen family and he was willing to give it to Isla as long as Mike changed his mind.

He walked up towards Mike and helped him to sit down. Then he gave Mike a glass of water and said,

"Sorry grandpa, don't be angry. It's bad for your health."

When Mike calmed down, Colin said to Fiona, "Mom, please stop talking. It's your fault to enrage grandpa!"

"But I did that only for you..." Colin's words hit her with a hard blow on her chest. Hurt and broken, she stammered, "Nobody in this family understands me! Nobody thanked me for what I did for this family!"

"Enough now, just stop talking." Colin added, "Grandparents care more about Aron only because his parents are not alive and he needs more concern. But they treat me well and give me everything I want. It's unfair to judge them in this way."

Chapter 405 The Spring Festival (Part One)

"You..." Fiona was literally shaking in anger and humiliation. Her face became red. She could barely tolerate the insult but looking at her husband and son coyly giving in to the situation, she had no other choice than to become quiet.

"Fine." Colin walked up towards Fiona and said, "Mom, let's go. It's an important day for Aron and your presence is ruining the party for everyone."

Then he quietly escorted her out. Albert followed them immediately.

One could have heard a pin drop in the room for a while. And then Mike spoke. He covered his face with his two hands and heaved a sigh, "I'm so unfortunate to have such a disobedient son."

"Calm down. Otherwise, it will affect your health." Joanna patted Mike's back gently and persuaded him, "We all are well aware of Fiona's nature. This is nothing new to us. So there is no point in getting angry with her."

Mike managed to bring a smile on his face but could not hide the pain. He turned to John and said, "I'm

so sorry for... what happened today."

"It's Okay." John spoke after exchanging a glance with Jina, "Actually, that lady needn't worry so much.

We have discuss about the money for our daughter's wedding well in advance."

He stopped for a moment and added, "We... don't want any money from you."

"What?" Mike, Joanna and even Aron were taken aback. Aron said to John, "Please don't take Fiona's

words to your heart. The money... is paid by me. It has nothing to do with my grandparents. So please

don't feel the pressure to take it."

"It's not the money that concerns us." John smiled and said to Aron, "The economic gap between my

family and yours is immense. But it doesn't matter because we believe that Aron will treat Isla well. No

matter whether Aron is rich or not, we give our consent to their marriage."

John paused for a moment and continued, "I don't want to be considered to have allowed Isla to marry

Aron only for his family's fame or money. So I spoke with Jina and both of us mutually decided not to

accept your money."

"It's inappropriate..." Aron frowned and said, "This money is for your pension when you are old. You

have spent a lot to bring Isla up and now she has to leave you after getting married to me. This money... is not enough to express my appreciation for you so I hope you won't refuse it."

"Aron." Jina looked at Aron and said, "I can tell that you really love Isla from what you said to Isla's aunt. I think your heart for Isla is the best gift for her and us."

"We aren't old yet and with God's grace are also in good health. When we get old, please come and pay visits to us often with Isla. That will make us happier than anything else." Then she added, "Let's make a deal. John and I almost know nothing about how to prepare for a wedding, so... thank you for your help."

Mike and Joanna tried with all their might to persuade them to accept the money but failed.

The plan of the wedding was decided quickly, albeit following a small episode. When they all came out of the restaurant, Isla took her parents to the shopping mall and bought them new clothes and gifts for the Spring Festival.

Then Isla prolonged her stay in Y City for several days before she went back to the countryside with Aron.

At the new year's eve, Autumn called everyone from the Zhao family to her home including Emily to

celebrate together. Chris called Edward to invite him but he didn't answer the phone.

Chris was worried and called Edward again and again but she couldn't get through. In the afternoon,

Edward called her back and Chris finally felt assured. She charged him out of concern, "Why didn't you

answer my calls?"

"What happened? Do you have anything to tell me?" There was a lot of noise from Edward's side,

making his voice inaudible.

"It's the new year eve! Where are you now? I will pick you up and we will spend the night together."

Chris told Edward, her voice echoing love and excitement.

Edward laughed and said, "Sorry my Dear, I can't come back. I'm traveling now."

"Travel?" Chris was taken aback because she never expected that Edward would go on vacation on

such a special day. Then she asked, "When will you come back?"

"Maybe... after this month." Edward added, "Just wait for me for few days and I'll bring you a gift when I

come back."

Then he was about to hang up the phone but Chris stopped him immediately, "Hold on!"

"Is there anything else?" Edward asked. "My friends are waiting for me, " he added.

"Dad, have the matters between you and Rachel... all been settled?" This was one sensitive topic that

Chris never wanted to discuss with her father. She never wanted to mention Rachel but could not hold back her concerns for Edward.

Edward was quiet for a moment and then he replied, "Not yet. But Rachel has signed on the divorce agreement. I think... we can divorce after the Spring Festival."

Voice of people on the other side of the phone calling Edward to join them was clearly audible to Chris.

Edward said, "I'm sorry I have to hang up now. I'm going to dive. Happy new year, Chris! I'll give you a red envelop when I come back."

Edward always spent the Spring Festival every year by traveling before he got reunited with Chris. He had a group of friends in his company and had planed to travel with Rachel this year. Unfortunately, they would never have such a chance to be on a holiday together.

Edward was really disappointed for that.

But he could forget all his distress temporarily in the company of his friends. So he had a good time in this trip.

Gary asked Chris after she hung up the phone, "What did he say? Will he come home?"

Edward hadn't come home to spend the Spring Festival together with them for many years now. Gary really wanted him to come back this year though he didn't speak about this secret wish. When Chris called Edward, Gary was happy and thought he would come back.

But Chris shook her head and told Gary that Edward was traveling.

Gary was a little disheartened. But his mood changed for good because there were so many guests in his house.

Even Sam had come.

People gathered at the table, waiting for Nancy to put all the dishes on the table, while the countless firecrackers were set off to celebrate the big festival.

The Spring Festival was coming!

Chapter 406 The Spring Festival (Part Two)

It was the liveliest New Year for the Lu family. In the past, only three people spent New Year's Eve together. While other families were celebrating Spring Festival together, there was nothing to be cheerful about for the Lu family. Charles never cared for the grand festivities so it did not matter

whether his family had a party or not. So Spring Festival was usually quiet and cheerless. Gary was usually upset over the lack of celebration, but could do nothing to change the situation. So this year was totally different since Autumn and Sam were now members of the Lu family and would be participating in their first family reunion.

Even better, the Zhao family also decided to participate in the New Year festivities as well. Gary stared at Autumn, who had wrapped her arms around young Cindy. He was looking forward to having a great-grandson as soon as possible.

There was delicious food, merry-making, and laughter in the house. The joy was unmistakable.

With a big smile, Gary called out, "Gather together everyone. It is now time for red packets." He rubbed his hands together before bringing out the red packets. "Everyone will be getting a red packet. It is my New Year's wish for each of you, " he announced.

Everyone chorused, "Thank you, Grandpa!" Gary was tremendously pleased to see how his family sincerely appreciated his gifts and how much fun they were all having. After Gary, Arthur also gave away red packets to everyone. Autumn was teary-eyed with joy as she received two envelopes. Seeing her sentimental, those around her burst into laughter.

After dinner, Autumn asked Cindy to go out to the yard to join her in setting off the fireworks. Others started playing mahjong in the chess room. Emily, who said she was already tired, went to rest early.

Cindy, however, could not mask her sadness even as she tried to enjoy setting off the fireworks.

Autumn, who happened to look at her, was concerned about Cindy's mood and decided to ask why she was feeling blue despite the festivities.

She walked over to Cindy and gently asked, "What's wrong Cindy? Why do you look upset? You can tell me." She caught Cindy's hand in hers and then wrapped an arm around her shoulders.

"Sister Autumn, I..." Cindy found it difficult to speak as she felt Autumn's kindness. Then she could no longer keep the tears from streaming down her cheeks.

Seeing her distress, Autumn hugged Cindy tight to comfort her. She waited patiently until Cindy had calmed down, and then asked, "Why are you so sad, Cindy? I can't bear to see you like this. Please, tell me so I can help you out."

Cindy sniffed and nearly choked as she opened up to Autumn. "Sister Gina said my mom was pregnant and I would have a baby brother or sister soon. She also told me that once the baby was born they

would no longer like me." Cindy wrapped her arms around Autumn while trying to hold back tears. "She even said my mom would throw me away when my baby sister or brother was born," she wailed.

She sobbed some more, while she was still clinging to Autumn. Then Cindy looked up and said, "Sister Autumn, will my mom really abandon me? The thought really upsets me."

Autumn blew out a breath. "Cindy, I think Gina is just joking. You have nothing to worry about. Your mom and dad will never abandon you even with a new baby. You know that they love you very much."

She kept stroking Cindy's hair to console her. Autumn felt very bad for the little girl who must have been secretly upset for several days. So she took a deep breath hoping to make her feel better. "Cindy, you are an adorable girl. And your parents will never leave you or throw you away."

Cindy shook her head and cried out, "But Sister Gina told me that my mom and dad would only love the baby. She also said my grandparents would act the same way." Autumn understood that Cindy was still very young and her fear came from not being able to differentiate a joke from the truth.

It annoyed her slightly that Gina could be so cruel saying such things to the little girl. Autumn hugged

Cindy tighter, and then lifted her face before talking. "Cindy, listen to me. You have nothing to be afraid

of, okay?

Your mom and dad care for you very much. And parents will love their children forever. You must always remember this. Parents do not abandon their children, so yours won't, " she asserted.

Autumn paused to think of more to say something that would ease Cindy's fears. "Even if they have a baby soon, they will not stop loving you. While it's true your parents will pay more attention to the baby,

it's only because little babies need a lot of care because they can't do anything for themselves yet. But Cindy, you also know that you will be a big sister and you have to help your parents take care of your baby brother or sister. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

Cindy tried to comprehend what Autumn told her but still felt anxious. "Are you sure my parents won't throw me away, " she asked.

Autumn quickly replied, "Of course I'm sure!" Then she patted Cindy on the back. "To your parents, you are a treasure, someone very precious to them. I promise they will love you all of your life, " Autumn said confidently.

Cindy hugged Autumn once more. Then she slowly calmed down. Autumn finally heaved a sigh of relief at seeing the child less anxious. In order to distract her, she asked Cindy to help her start the fireworks

again. This time, Cindy looked better and was already smiling.

Inside the living room, Abby was talking about her pregnancy and everyone listening were happy about the news. No one noticed Cindy and how upset she seemed.

As Autumn walked in, Abby teased her, "Autumn, I am pregnant again. You better hurry to catch up."

Instead of joining in the banter, Autumn requested Cindy's grandmother to take care of the child. Then she went to sit down beside Abby and asked in a low voice, "Are you really pregnant?"

The question shocked and confused Abby, who was briefly silent. Then she answered, "Of course I am pregnant!" Almost hissing, she told Autumn, "I had a pregnancy test before the Spring Festival. I am already two months pregnant now." She looked at Autumn's face, her eyes wondering why there seemed to be doubt about her pregnancy.

"Why do you have such question?" she asked Autumn. "What's wrong?" she said worriedly. Abby then noted that Autumn looked more worried than cheerful. And this added to her confusion. "What's the matter Autumn? Aren't you happy for me? You look kind of worried, " Abby pointed out.

"I'm sorry, Abby. I didn't mean to upset you. Of course I'm glad for you and your condition. It's just

that..." Autumn hesitated slightly then continued, "Please don't forget to pay attention to Cindy even while you're pregnant. She has been upset these days, " she said and waited for Abby's reaction.

"Cindy?" There was a look of confusion in Abby's face. "What's wrong with her? Is she upset because of my pregnancy? Is that what you're trying to tell me, Autumn?" The reminder shocked her, and Abby started to worry about her older daughter.

Autumn frowned as she related what happened. "Cindy cried while we were outside setting off fireworks. When I asked her why, she said someone told her that you would abandon her once the baby was born." She stared at Abby and then continued, "Cindy is just a little girl and can't distinguish between jokes and the truth, so she is worried and afraid she will be abandoned when the new baby comes." Then she blurted, "And who is Sister Gina?"

There was a flash of annoyance in Abby's eyes before she replied, "Oh, I see. I've been feeling uncomfortable last few days and was wondering why Cindy appeared upset. But she doesn't even want to come close to me. Now I get it." With that, she stood up, left a startled Autumn and headed straight to the mahjong table where her husband Andy was playing. She quickly pinched his ear and it made him cry out, "Ouch! That hurts. Honey, stop that!" He stared at his wife, but was turning red from

embarrassment.

"Yes, that hurts all right! I'm warning you to get Gina out of our house, " Abby demanded. "If you don't, I will move out with Cindy." While Abby was usually kind and even-tempered, she could also behave like a shrew especially if it came to protecting her daughter. She would never tolerate anyone hurting Cindy. And her little girl was hurting now because of someone saying very cruel things to her.

"What's wrong with Gina?" a bewildered Andy asked. Amy quickly walked over and patted Abby's hands. "Please watch your manners, " she said. Amy pointed to Abby's belly. "Remember that you're pregnant. It is bad for the baby when the mother is stressed or angry. Not good for antenatal training." Abby relaxed her clenched fists. Then she touched her belly, rubbed it gently and sat down on a nearby chair. She inhaled and exhaled to relax and told Andy again, "I want Gina out of my house when we get back." She still could not contain her anger and threatened, "If you can't promise to do that, I am not keeping this baby!"

"What?! You..." Andy was still clueless about what set off his wife's sudden violent behavior. As irritating as it was, he knew he could not get mad at Abby considering her delicate condition and her

temperament, which he was very well aware of. "Okay, okay. I promise to do what you said. Just don't be so furious and take care of our baby," he said.

"Watch out for the baby? You only care about this unborn baby, Andy? Why haven't you been paying more attention to Cindy?" Abby cried out. Thinking about Gina, she lost her cool again and snarled at Andy, "If you insist on letting her stay in the house, she will continue to mislead Cindy with thoughtless words. Are you aware that Cindy has been upset and frustrated lately?"

Andy looked even more confused at his wife's ranting. "What nonsense are you talking about?" Amy nearly shouted. Amy stepped in, frowning, and said, "Gina may be a country girl, but she is understanding and sensible. Besides, Andy's relative entrusted her care to him until she finds a job in Y City. I'm certain it is a small matter to let her stay in the house. Don't be so mean," she addressed Abby.

Abby blew out a breath, and exasperated over the situation. "Mom..." she began. "Do you really think I am a selfish and cruel person and I will not welcome those who need a home temporarily?" Abby asked. Then eyes flashing with fire she continued, "If she did not say those things to Cindy, I would definitely not ask her to leave the house." Eyebrows raised she turned to Andy, "Do you know what she

told Cindy?"

Abby then looked at Cindy and motioned her to come. "Cindy, please come here." She waved at the little girl, feeling guilty that she had ignored her daughter and her feelings lately.

Chapter 407 Cindy's Fears

Cindy looked at her mother, considered for a moment, and then walked towards Abby. Fear was written all over her face. "Mom..." she called out.

Abby smiled at her little girl in encouragement. "Come. Don't be scared." She thought of what Cindy had been suffering through recently and felt guilty and sad. She held out her arms to the girl and hugged her for reassurance. Then she gently asked, "Can you tell me what Gina said to you?"

Cindy felt her heart pounding. She kept quiet, hesitant to answer her mother. Then she saw Autumn, who gave her an encouraging look while Abby kept repeating, "Don't be scared, I won't allow anyone to hurt you."

The girl shut her eyes for a moment. Claspng her hands together, she began, "She said you and Dad wouldn't like me anymore and would drive me away once the baby was born."

Just the thought of being sent away made Cindy break down and cry. Then she pleaded with her

mother, "I promise to be a good girl from now on. Just please don't send me away."

Everyone who heard Cindy was aghast and felt pity for the girl in tears. Abby turned to Andy and said,

"Look what you've done. You made Gina a part of our family, fed her, and let her stay in our home, but

what did she do? She fed Cindy all this nonsense! Cindy is only a little girl and I won't let anybody hurt

her." She hugged Cindy protectively. "If you don't ask Gina to leave, I will never go home with Cindy, "

Abby threatened.

Andy was shocked at what Cindy said. He felt pain for his daughter after learning of her ordeal. He

approached the girl, squatted in front of her and said, "Cindy, come."

She hesitated, and reached out to Andy. He looked at his daughter and saw the once cute and naughty

girl gripped by fear after reliving Gina's cruel words. And she had suffered in silence, with no one

noticing.

She stood quietly and then was hugged by her father. Cindy was still shaking inside. Andy gently

asked, "Did she say anything else? Did she do anything to you?"

Cindy quickly bowed her head. "She..." Starting to sniffle again, she said, "She pinched me. And it was

painful." Looking at her father, she went on, "Then she told me not to tell anyone about what

happened."

Again, everyone was shocked by the revelation. They never thought someone so young could bear so much suffering. Abby felt her heart break as Cindy narrated what Gina did. She quickly pulled Cindy to hug her tightly and burst into tears.

And Cindy broke down into tears along with her mother.

Andy's face turned dark. Like any father, he would do everything to protect his children. He promptly called his so-called aunt and demanded she take Gina away immediately. If she did not leave, he threatened to call the police.

But instead of understanding the situation, the woman turned nasty, insulting Andy and blaming him for not rewarding her family even as he had benefited from their care when he was young.

Andy did not argue, and kept quiet until she finally got exhausted from talking. Then he spoke emphasizing every word. "You should be thankful I did not call the police to take Gina away. I don't know how much I benefited from you, but I am aware of every gift and the money you received from my family every year. You don't want me to lose my temper so you'd better do as I say."

Andy hung up, took a deep breath to calm himself and spoke to Abby. "Please stop crying. I've already asked Gina to leave."

Then he hugged Cindy again and reassured her repeatedly that she would never be abandoned no matter how many children they had. The little girl looked at her father and felt relieved.

Everyone was grateful that the problem was settled early on. Even if Cindy suffered, she would heal quickly. Had it not been discovered immediately, the outcome would have been more devastating.

Abby did not even dare imagine what would have happened to her daughter if they never found out what was bothering her.

Because of the drama the guests witnessed, no one wanted to continue playing the game and they all decided to go home. While watching TV in bed, Autumn thought about what happened to Cindy and again felt a bit distressed.

Charles saw how much Autumn was affected by the evening's events. They agreed that once they had a baby, only people close to them could babysit and no one else.

Autumn wanted to shake off the heavy feeling so she got out of the bed. "Where are you going?"

Charles asked in surprise.

She smiled, patted her husband's cheek and then said, "I'm going to get some milk to help me sleep.

You go ahead and sleep." She changed into pajamas and headed down to the kitchen. Before she reached the bottom of the stairs, she heard Nancy answer the phone. Although she tried to keep her voice low, Nancy's voice could be heard clearly from the stairs because the rest of the house was very quiet.

Autumn could hear Nancy saying to the caller, "Don't hurt him, please. I'll give the money you want, but I need more time."

Nancy paused to listen, then pleaded, "Yes, I know. But it's a large sum of money, which I don't have right now. So please give me more time."

Again she listened before finally saying, "Thank you! I now know what to do. I will do it as soon as possible."

After hanging up, she collapsed on a chair and began to cry. It was the first time Autumn saw Nancy look so sad and helpless.

She guessed Nancy must have run into some money problem and was negotiating over the phone.

Autumn quickly decided to go back to their room, and took the red envelop filled with money she received as Spring Festival gift. She made sure Nancy would be aware she was coming down the stairs, to let the woman compose herself. Nancy wiped her tear-stained cheek, but her eyes were obviously swollen from crying.

"Nancy? Are you still cleaning? Stop that now. Come here and sit a moment, " she invited. She spoke in mild tones, but Nancy was a bit hesitant.

"Do you need anything from me, Mrs. Lu?" she asked Autumn. Still struggling with emotions, she managed to sound cold as she spoke to Autumn.

It puzzled her why Autumn invited her to sit with her.

Autumn patted the seat beside her and said, "Come, sit beside me. I don't want to talk to you while you're standing."

Nancy considered for a moment, and finally sat down but not too close to Autumn.

Fortunately, Autumn didn't care about Nancy's cool demeanor. Instead, she smiled and said, "Here, I want you to have this."

She handed Nancy the red envelop containing all the money she got, and from its thickness, Nancy

deduced it contained several thousand.

As surprised as she was over the gesture, Nancy quickly refused. "No, I can't accept it."

But Autumn was just as insistent. "Just take it." She put the envelop in Nancy's hands and pushed it

towards her. "You deserve it because you have served this family for many years, helping Charles and

Grandpa a lot by making sure everything ran smoothly."

"I'm sorry. I can't accept it," Nancy repeated. She sat up straight and proudly said, "I only did what I am

supposed to do. I have my salary and your grandfather already gave me a red envelop earlier. So it's

not right to accept yours."

But Autumn would not take no for an answer and continued to persuade Nancy with a smile. "It's

different from the red envelop you got from Grandpa. Please just accept it."

Even though she suspected Nancy was having money problems, Autumn was not about to ask her

about it. But she really just wanted to help Nancy thus she insisted on giving the money.

"Mrs. Lu, I..." Slightly embarrassed, Nancy frowned, not knowing how to answer Autumn.

Chapter 408 Mystery Man (Part One)

Autumn stood firm. "Just take it, please. And it's getting late so you'd better get some rest." Then she

stood up and headed towards the kitchen, which was her original plan.

Nancy wondered why Autumn really came down. "What do you need, Mrs. Lu?" she asked. Autumn's generosity made her feel somewhat guilty.

"Oh, I was just going to heat some milk, " Autumn replied. She turned to look at Nancy and said, "We are family, Nancy. So, if you're ever in any kind of trouble, we'd like to know. Charles and I will do all we can to help you."

Nancy nodded and said, "All right." She put the red envelop inside her pocket, bowed and thought,

'While this money is not nearly enough, it is still better than nothing.' Nancy decided to assist Autumn.

"Mrs. Lu, let me heat the milk for you, " she offered. She hurried to the kitchen. Then she secretly took out a small packet of powder from her pocket. Hesitating for several seconds, she then sprinkled it into Autumn's milk.

'Autumn, I didn't do it on purpose, ' she thought to herself.

'I need money to pay that man, otherwise...' Nancy frowned slightly.

Autumn took over the milk and said, "Thank you." She smiled and told Nancy, "Why don't you get some rest now. Good night."

Nancy bid Autumn good night as well. But as she watched Autumn going up the stairs, she called out,

"Mrs. Lu..."

Autumn turned around. "Did you need something?" From where she stood, Autumn thought Nancy was saying something but she couldn't quite hear it because of the sound of firecrackers exploding outside.

Then Nancy simply smiled and said, "Oh nothing. Thank you again."

Autumn brought the milk to the bedroom, and after drinking, soon fell asleep.

Children loved the Spring Festival because it meant a visit to their friends' families, and they could wear beautiful clothes and eat lots of delicious food. But the thrill ended once they grew up. For adults, it was just a common festival with firecrackers, and signaled they would add another year to their age. And the sense of happiness that the festival brought quickly waned as the festivities came to an end.

It was the end of January when Autumn was informed that Wendy's execution had been carried out. It was death by shooting. And since Yvonne was locked up in jail, Autumn, as Wendy's only other relative, had the task of arranging her funeral.

Although she knew that Wendy would be executed, Autumn was still stunned after receiving the call

from the police. After a long pause, she answered, "Okay, I will be there."

She sat down in disbelief that Wendy died without her being aware of any sign that her mother was gone. Then everything that happened came back clearly to her, as if they just happened yesterday.

Charles noticed the change in Autumn's face. "Are you okay?" He looked at her with concern, wondering why she still held the phone.

She sighed and turned to Charles. "I'm fine." Autumn hung up the phone and told Charles what the call was about. "The police asked me to take care of Wendy's remains. Her execution was carried out today."

Charles hugged Autumn for a while, and said, "I'll go with you." The couple left shortly, and headed to the prison facility where Wendy's remains awaited. It was snowing hard and there were cracks on the road, which made it difficult to walk on their way in. After waiting for all the paperwork to be completed,

the police turned over the cinerary with Wendy's ashes to Autumn.

It was warm inside the prison facility but Autumn couldn't help shuddering as she held on to the cinerary.

"Are you all right?" Charles gently asked. She shook off the feeling of dread, and replied, "I'm fine. Let's go."

Autumn arranged a small funeral for her mother. Since she and Yvonne were Wendy's only surviving relatives and Yvonne was unable to attend, it was Autumn who took care of all the preparations.

Looking at Wendy's smiling photo on her tombstone, she suddenly felt an overwhelming sense of sadness.

If only her mother treated her with even the slightest bit of mercy, maybe her life would not have ended up this way.

Now it was all over, with no opportunity to make amends.

Autumn wrapped her coat tightly as the wind blew. Then she laid the flowers on Wendy's grave and left immediately without looking back.

Inside the walls of Y City prison was small windows that allowed the sun to shine through.

It was this sight that gave the people languishing in jail the hope that they would someday be free.

Yvonne's favorite pastime was to be lost in reverie while staring at the sun's rays as it came through that window. Sometimes, she would see birds flying by. It was from that window where she often found

pleasure to wash away the dull days.

"Someone's here to see you, Yvonne Gu!" a voice rang out. The prison guard had called her and the cell door was soon opened. Still, her face remained stoic, not caring who her visitor was.

She suddenly heard a stranger voice calling her name. When she turned around, Yvonne saw an unfamiliar face. She adjusted her vision trying to see more clearly.

As Yvonne focused on the stranger's face, she quickly averted her eyes, and suddenly felt numb all over.

Everything that happened to her in the recent past came flooding back. She was once a respected lady of the Gu family but now all respect for her was gone. She was accused of helping kill her father. And now she was in prison, paying for her crime.

Yvonne could not accept that truth. She attempted to kill herself several times, but someone always rescued her.

She refused to glance at the man again. Instead, she turned around, staring at her favorite window and kept silent.

So the visitor walked up to her and squatted in front of her. Yvonne couldn't really make out his face because of the dim light. Then he lifted her chin so she looked directly at him. He smirked and said,

"Wow. You look so pathetic. From a distinguished lady to a criminal."

"Who are you?" Yvonne whispered. She hunched her shoulders and added, "I don't know you." The man was now sneering. And Yvonne kept staring at her hands.

"You really don't know who I am?" he snarled. Yvonne jumped a little when he pulled off the hair covering his face. It was horrible, marked by a huge scar that disfigured his face. Then he asked, "Now, do you recognize this scar on my face?"

Yvonne shut her eyes to think. Then, "Oh! It's you!" she said as recognition dawned on her. This time her eyes were wide with shock. Once she recognized who it was, she shivered in fear. She tried to swat away his hands holding her face and cried, "I had nothing to do with what happened to you. It was Autumn. It was all her fault!"

"Oh, I know. I will never forget what was done to me, " he said menacingly. With a devious smile, he grabbed Yvonne's hand and held it tightly. "I want you to remember that I am not letting you, or her, get away with this. Ever!" he snapped.

Fearful now, Yvonne pleaded, "I had nothing to do with it. I swear..." As panic rose, she tried to escape from his clutches but the room was so narrow that he easily caught Yvonne and hurled her to the ground.

She was scared and that gave him so much satisfaction. Looming above her, he growled, "I want to make a deal with you."

Cowering, Yvonne said, "No! I won't do it. Just please leave." Desperate now, she shouted, "You are the devil! I don't want to see you. Go away!" Yvonne prayed a prison guard could hear her.

Her shouts made him snap. "Shut up!" he screamed at her. Then he slapped Yvonne so hard across the cheek that she slumped to the ground. With fire in his eyes, he declared, "From now on, you have no right to say no to me!"

Chapter 409 A Mystery Man (Part Two)

"Ahhh!" Yvonne screamed. She felt pain radiating to the rest of her face and completely folded her body on the floor, fearful of being struck again.

The mysterious visitor was breathing heavily. Then, he said, "To be honest, I hate Autumn much more than I hate you." Not only was his face disfigured, Autumn had destroyed his life as well. He swore he

would make Autumn pay.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Yvonne whimpered. She peered at him, feeling both pain and fear that this could be her end if she did not agree to his demands.

"I'm sure you are dying to get out of this place, " said he. He hunched down and looked at Yvonne with a sneer. "I could help you get out of here." Yvonne was listening. "But... you have to do everything I tell you."

She thought, 'What do I have to lose?' Yvonne was sick of the dark and dreary hole she was stuck in. If it meant leaving the place, she wouldn't mind doing this stranger's bidding. "Okay, I will do whatever you ask. Just take me away from this dreadful place, " she decided.

The stranger clapped his hands in glee at Yvonne's submission.

Not long after that visit, Yvonne was reported to have escaped prison. Autumn could not believe the news, thinking it was just a hoax. But the police called to warn her about the escaped felon and asked to report Yvonne's whereabouts urgently.

Still Autumn found it incredulous that Yvonne would be able to break out of prison. For certain, she had help because it was not something she could do alone.

Autumn opted to keep this development a secret, even from Charles. But he knew it somehow. He was worried about Yvonne and decided to check on Yvonne's visitors. He came upon an unfamiliar name: Ferry Fang.

Charles asked his wife, "Autumn, do you know anyone named Ferry Fang?" She looked at him blankly.

Charles doubted she had any idea about who the man was. He also noted that lately, Autumn's memory was quite erratic, and getting worse.

"I don't recall anyone by that name, " she finally replied. Her efforts to remember the name were futile and this made her a bit impatient. Suddenly, she snapped at Charles, "Don't ask me anything more about it. I am already very confused!"

Charles was taken aback at Autumn's outburst. "What is wrong with you?" he asked worriedly. He already sensed something was not right with his wife, especially her sudden change in moods. He tried reaching out to her.

But Autumn brushed off his hand. "I'm fine, " she snapped. Autumn quickly stood up and announced, "I'm tired and will rest upstairs."

Charles stared at his wife's receding figure, anxious about her seeming abnormal behavior lately.

He didn't notice Nancy, who watched a slightly deranged Autumn head upstairs. Stealthily, she made a call and said, "I've done what you asked. I've been giving Autumn the drug and she's now showing signs of insanity. Will you let me see my son?"

"Ahhh, definitely. You have my word," the person on the other line said. He continued to speak, "But you have to keep giving it to her until Autumn becomes totally unstable. And then I will allow you to see your son."

Nancy became agitated. "You should have honored our deal. I already gave you money so that I could see my son," she whispered.

Nancy held on to the receiver tightly, fear gripping her. 'What if my son is harmed while being held in custody all this time,' she thought.

The stranger on the phone said menacingly, "Nancy, there is no trade-off to speak of here." He laughed eerily. "You either follow my orders to fulfill the task or else..."

"All right! Just be sure my son will return safe and sound," Nancy agreed. She knew there was no way out and she had to do his bidding. "What else do you want me to do?" Nancy asked.

The stranger was now smiling, satisfied with her responses.

Autumn was behaving abnormally, unable to hold her temper or even remember things. Worse, she had become paranoid that Charles was cheating on her.

Charles was both worried about his wife, and losing his patience over her behavior.

He tried to bring Autumn to the doctor for a thorough check-up but she threw a terrible tantrum and hit

Charles several times until he gave up. Everyone who knew of her situation was suddenly worried that she was losing her mind.

Arthur decided to ask a doctor-friend to examine Autumn at home. She threw him out of the house in anger, which left Arthur extremely embarrassed.

As the doctor left, he advised Arthur, "The symptoms manifested by her may be drug-induced. I've seen this in another case. You might consider this as the cause and conduct a careful investigation."

After Charles was told about this assumption, he thought of Nancy.

She was the only other person in close contact with Autumn daily, and was responsible for preparing food for Autumn.

So he decided to keep a close watch on Nancy for several days. He was annoyed when his sleuthing yielded nothing. There was even one day when he came off work as he searched online for the cause of Autumn's symptoms.

One evening, Leila returned to the office for something she forgot and found Charles' office all lit up.

She knocked and entered. "Mr. Lu, why are you still here? It's already very late."

"I needed to use my computer and didn't realize what time it was, " he replied. He sat back, composed, and then inquired, "And what brings you here? Did you forget something important?" Leila saw an opportunity and decided to take it.

"I bought some dinner on my way home and realized I forgot something so I came back, " she explained. "Mr. Lu... would you like to join me for dinner?" She motioned eating at the office.

"That sounds great!" Charles answered. No one was more surprised than Leila that her boss agreed to the invitation.

The truth was Charles was getting sick of Autumn's suspicions and her cursing and wanted to relax.

Dining with Leila would be relaxing, he decided.

The secretary quickly moved to set up the food, grateful for the company. As she opened the meal box,

a tempting aroma floated in the room.

"That smells delicious, " Charles complimented. He was thankful for her offer. With Autumn so unstable these days, it had been a long time since she cooked for him.

"Well, have your fill, " said Leila. She made sure Charles would be satisfied with the food, then, carefully pried out information. "Mr. Lu, are you not being served well at home?" Leila asked innocently.

Seeing him wolf down the food astonished her. It seemed like he missed having a good meal.

Charles was thoroughly enjoying his food and gave no thought to keeping his situation a secret.

"Because of certain domestic matters, I have not enjoyed a single meal at home in quite a while." He straightened up, patted his stomach and said, "But it is very kind of you to give me a meal." Charles smiled at Leila in gratitude.

At that moment, he was reluctant to go home and deal with Autumn.

Chapter 410 Autumn Got Pregnant

Even though Charles knew that Autumn didn't do that on purpose, he could not help but feel a pinch of disappointment with her.

"Never mind, it was just a simple meal." Leila said with a rather assuring smile, "Please do help

yourself."

Leila wasn't hungry but she kept persuading and urging Charles to eat more.

"Mr. Lu, can you... please tell me what happened?" Leila encouraged him to open up, "Maybe you will feel better once you speak it out. And you can trust that whatever you tell me will remain between us."

"I am fine." Charles let out a bitter smile as he simply could not even think of troubling anyone else with his burden.

"Then... you can just tell me whenever you decide to talk about it with others." Leila drew the line there and stopped nudging him to open up as she knew how Charles didn't like the women who were too enthusiastic around him. She cleaned up the table carefully after dinner and said to Charles, "I need to leave now, Mr. Lu."

"Hold on." Charles put on his jacket as he offered, "I'll drop you back home. It's the least I can do."

Charles wanted to express his gratitude for Leila in a way that he could.

Leila nodded her head in approval. This had presented itself as a perfect opportunity to draw closer to him and she had absolutely no reason to refuse it.

On their way to Leila's home, she didn't say anything because Charles wasn't in a good mood. When

his car pulled over outside her home, Leila said, "Would you join me upstairs for a cup of tea?"

"No, thank you. I have troubled you enough for one night." Charles didn't want to go home but that did not mean he would brazenly head to another woman's house and betray Autumn.

He finally decided to go home. Once he reached, the living room was pitch dark and he saw Autumn perched on the sofa with a sad expression as switched on the light. Autumn stared back at him and asked, "Where did you go? Why have you come home so late?"

"I was occupied with quite a lot of work in the office." Then he added, "It is quite late. Why didn't you just go to sleep?"

"You are lying!" Autumn yelled at Charles with hatred and disgust, "I called you on your personal extension number in the office. You were not there! So I ask you again where did you go?"

"I told you I was working in the company. What is it that you want to hear?" Charles got impatient. Her interrogation and accusations did not annoy him, but... instead he was confused as to why Autumn refused to go to hospital and get treatment.

Charles felt like he was about to go insane after such a long time. So, when he returned and had to

face Autumn's vexatious inquiry, he almost lost his temper.

"I just want to know where you went. If you didn't do anything wrong, then why are you hesitating to tell

me the truth?" Autumn walked up towards Charles and said, "Just tell me if you have a mistress

outside the bounds of this house."

"No! No! No!" Charles felt so weak from her attacks. He looked into her eyes and said, "Everyday you

ask me these same questions. When will this madness stop? You are sick and you need to receive

treatment in hospital. I can't bear to handle you any more."

"I'm not sick!" Autumn flashed an angry stare at Charles, almost as though the man standing in front of

her was not her husband but an enemy.

"What are you arguing about?" Their angry and loud exchanges woke Chris up. She came out of her

bedroom and persuaded Autumn, "Autumn, you are the only woman my brother loves. I can assure

you that until my last breath. He will never have any mistress. He could not bear to disappoint you.

Please trust him."

"You are lying!" Autumn didn't believe what Chris was saying either. She sneered as she responded,

"You two siblings have united to cheat me. You don't understand me at all and just don't want me to know the truth."

Autumn had the same maddening dream everyday. It had convinced her and gripped her stronger than reality itself.

In her dream, Charles dated different women almost every day without even looking in her direction.

She couldn't differentiate between the dream and reality so she questioned Charles again and again.

Chris was just about to speak to Autumn when Autumn pushed her aside and shouted, "Leave me alone. Don't touch me!"

"You don't think you are enough for me, Autumn Zhao?" Charles frowned and said, "I promised you time and again that I would never betray your trust because I only love you. So now what can I do to make you believe me?"

But really what else could he do now?

To be honest, Autumn didn't know the answer either. All she knew was that her doubts and concerns were clouding her mind.

It seemed that she was split into two persons. One was asking her to trust Charles and calm down

while the other rather irrational side yelled at her not to trust him because he was a liar.

She painfully hugged her head with hands and squatted. She wanted to tell Charles that she was not doing all this on purpose but before she could utter anything she fainted and collapsed onto the floor.

"Autumn! Autumn..." Charles immediately rushed to her aid and supported her head under his palms as he kept calling her name. But she didn't respond. Charles then immediately rushed her to the hospital.

After a rather quick examination, the doctor told Charles with concern, "She is healthy in body but..."

"But what?" Charles looked at the doctor nervously and said in a rather anxious tone, "You can just tell me about her real condition."

"We have found a lot of medicine in her system which has led her to develop a mental disorder. This medicine could have caused severe damage to her mind. We can't ascertain the extent of this damage without conducting some more tests. But this is the reason why she always has nightmares and could not distinguish between dreams and reality. Moreover, another side effect is her bad temper and also violent behavior." Then the doctor asked Charles, "How long... have these symptoms been appearing?"

"From the beginning of this new year right up till now." Charles considered for a moment as he recalled

the recent past and answered the doctor honestly.

"No, actually this has been happening since the end of the last year." Sam said abruptly, "Doctor, I felt that she was weird before the new year. Her memory got foggy then but it wasn't so severe as it is now, so I didn't think much about it."

Charles frowned and looked at Sam. He believed Sam was right but...

He wondered why he didn't notice these glaring abnormal symptoms of Autumn especially when even Sam had found them.

In that moment, he felt he neglected her and was an unqualified husband.

"It seems that she has been taking this medicine for a long time only that could explain how the effect is so adverse." Charles got restless as he heard the bad news from the doctor. He asked, "Can it be cured?"

"Yes, it can, but..." The doctor looked at Charles with reluctance and disappointment.

"But what?" Charles' heart was now beating outside his body out of nervousness. He urged the doctor to tell him so the doctor had to speak out honestly, "Mrs. Lu is pregnant. If we use medicines to treat her disease, it could be fatal to the baby in her womb. So I think... you can have a discussion with her

once she wakes up and make a decision together."

"There is no need to discuss this with her especially when she is mentally unstable. Just get rid of the kid!" Charles said affirmatively. They could always try for another baby in the future. But if Autumn died because of this baby, Charles would never forgive himself.

"No!" Charles heard Autumn's voice just as he made the decision for them. She looked rather weak after knowing what happened from Chris. She commanded Chris to take her there and find out the truth about her disease. Unexpectedly, she heard Charles' talk with the doctor.

She knew what Charles did was for her sake, but she was the mother of the baby. It was in her womb and she couldn't be so cruel as to end a life.

With that in mind, she said to the doctor in a tough tone, "Doctor, I want to keep this baby so please try your best to help me while I carry this life within me..."