

# Mr. Edwards' Unraveled Life

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## Chapter 901

Even after the Seguins left, the fallout stayed.

No one had proof, but whispers spread fast. People treated Rhea like a criminal. She became an outcast—except for Jace.

Whenever rumors flared, Jace shut them down cold.

"This is a hospital, not a gossip mill. Knock it off," he'd say, his tone like steel.

It quieted things, but only a little.

Back in his office, Rhea tried to smile. "Thank you for standing up for me."

Jace looked at her. "If you don't feel like smiling, don't."

She froze.

"It doesn't suit you," he added.

"Sorry," she muttered, stopping herself mid-sentence.

She didn't even realize how used to apologizing she'd become. But Jace noticed.

"You don't owe me anything," he said gently. "Why are you letting them tear you apart like this? Why don't you fight back?"

Her voice was small. "I've tried. No one believes me."

It was true. Lies spread faster than truth. People already thought she was ungrateful—the Seguins took her in, and now she'd 'betrayed' them.

No one cared about the years she worked herself to the bone for them.

"I gave them everything," she whispered. "I paid every bill. I even helped after Phillip's accident. After Teresa died, I took on everything."

Jace frowned. "You never mentioned that."

She gave a hollow smile. "Didn't have anyone to tell. All I did was work side jobs."

Her entire life had been work—no rest, no joy.

Jace's eyes darkened. The more she spoke, the angrier he became. How could anyone put her through this?

Rhea kept talking, unaware. "I mostly did it for Teresa. She was the only one who ever cared."

Her voice cracked at the memory.

As a child, the Seguins ignored her. Phillip bullied her—locking her out, sabotaging her homework. Mr. Seguin always blamed her for everything.

"They really treated you like that?" Jace asked quietly.

She nodded. "It took me years to realize it was because I wasn't their biological child."

Jace's voice was cold. "That's not an excuse. If they didn't want to care, why adopt you?"

She had no answer. That question haunted her, too.

After a long pause, Jace rubbed his temples. His pale skin glowed under the office light, his fingers moving with quiet tension.

Rhea stared at his hands, lost in thought.

Then Jace spoke. "So what now? You're not even related to them. Still planning to let them control your life? Ever think of finding your real parents?"

Her breath caught.

Jace leaned back, tapping his desk. "Tell me everything that happened with Phillip."

She took a breath and told him everything.

He listened closely. "He just collapsed?"

She nodded, still confused.

Jace didn't hesitate. "Drugs. Could be an overdose."

Her eyes widened. "No way. He's awful, but I didn't think he'd do drugs."

"Sixty percent chance it was inhalation," Jace said. "I saw the security footage. His symptoms match. And the money he's always blowing through? Probably went there."

The logic hit like a hammer. Rhea's voice trembled. "He always begged me for money. Their savings, their pension—I never knew where it all went."

The truth hit her full force. She stood, shaking. “So all the money I starved to save—went to drugs?”

All her sacrifices. For *this*?

## Chapter 902

Rhea was burning with anger, ready to storm into Phillip’s room and demand the truth. But Jace’s hand on her arm stopped her.

“You won’t get anything out of him right now,” he said calmly. “He’s still unconscious in the ICU. If anyone sees you near him, it’ll only make things worse.”

Her anger cooled as reality sank in. Every move she made was still being watched. The hospital gossip had quieted, but the judgmental looks remained. She wasn’t in the clear yet.

She sank into a chair, covering her face with her hands. “Thanks, Dean. I wasn’t thinking straight.”

After a moment, she looked up at him, her voice softer. “I’m really glad you’re here.”

Jace’s expression flickered before he said, “You’re my assistant. Of course I’ve got your back. All we need is a urine test.”

But even that wasn’t easy. When Mrs. Seguin found out, she jumped in the way.

“Don’t you dare touch my son! Rhea, if you have any decency left, you’ll make him back off!”

Rhea clenched her jaw. “We’re just running a test. Why are you so against it?”

“This is your fault!” Mrs. Seguin snapped. “You think anyone trusts you after what you did?”

Jace stood firm, but Mrs. Seguin raised her voice, attracting attention. “Look at this! Our adopted daughter put my son in the ICU, and now she’s back to finish the job!”

People started to gather. One whispered, “That’s her—snapped over something petty and now her brother’s in a coma.”

“What a snake,” another muttered. “They had a son already. Why adopt a liability?”

The words didn’t hurt the way they used to. Rhea had heard it all before. What grounded her now was Jace, standing solidly at her side.

He shot Mrs. Seguin a cold glare. “This is a hospital. We follow protocol. If you don’t like it, discharge your son and free up the bed.”

His tone was icy, his presence commanding. Mrs. Seguin's face turned red. "You're the dean! How can you not care whether my son lives?"

Jace smirked. "Why should I? I'm not his father."

The crowd fell silent. Even Rhea was stunned—she didn't know Jace could cut so deep, and she had to admit—it felt good.

Mrs. Seguin blocked the doorway. "You two are in on this! You'll have to get through me first!"

Jace moved like he might actually do it. She flinched and backed off. Hands in his pockets, he said coolly, "If I stepped on you, you'd probably complain about that too."

Before things escalated further, a nurse stepped in and pulled Mrs. Seguin away.

Rhea followed Jace into the ward. Her steps halted when she saw the bed. "Phillip... you're awake?"

Her voice shook with surprise. No one told her—not even the nurse.

Jace's expression darkened. He turned to the nurse. "Who's on duty here?"

The nurse looked down. "Omin..."

"She's fired," Jace said without blinking.

The room went still. Phillip's eyes flashed with panic before he quickly masked it with a sneer. "What now? Want to finish me off in here? Don't forget—this is a hospital."

He looked at Jace and added mockingly, "Even your boyfriend can't save you if someone dies."

Rhea's eyes burned. "Watch your mouth, Phillip. Want me to remind you how to talk to people?"

"Oh, you've grown a spine?" he sneered. "Big talk for someone who used to be nothing."

Jace ignored him and told the nurse to prep the test. Rhea turned to Phillip. "Get up. We're doing the test."

He leaned back smugly. "You want my cooperation? Come help me up like you used to, little sis."

His words made her skin crawl. She gripped the test tube, tempted to smash it into his face.

Before she could react, Jace grabbed Phillip by the arm. Phillip yelped, "You can't do this—I'm a patient!"

Jace didn't flinch. He dragged him into the bathroom and locked the door behind them. Phillip banged on it, screaming.

"You want out?" Jace said coldly. "Then take the test."

Phillip cursed, but eventually gave in. The nurse collected the sample.

Jace released him, face unreadable. Rhea watched, something shifting inside her—admiration, maybe something more.

The results came back quickly. Rhea scanned them, her breath catching. Just like Jace had predicted.

The blood test confirmed it.

Jace looked at her. "You want to confront him?"

She shook her head. It was all clear—no point asking. The money she had worked so hard for had been spent on poison.

"Call the police," she said firmly, laying the report down.

It was the first time she had been this certain about cutting ties with the Seguin family. Jace raised an eyebrow but made the call. The police came and took the reports.

### **Chapter 903**

Phillip's collapse was ruled a drug overdose. Rhea was cleared.

But Phillip kept denying it, thrashing as the police restrained him. "I didn't take anything! This is a setup! Rhea, we raised you—how can you do this? Are you even human?"

The hospital hallway buzzed with whispers. Rhea stood tall, voice steady. "You raised me? Fine. But six million? That debt's paid."

Six million—an impossible amount she'd scraped together through years of side jobs and sacrifice. The Seguins hadn't spent even a fraction of that on her. She paid her own tuition. Her own meals. Did they ever truly care?

The only person she'd cared about was Teresa. But Teresa was gone—and so was any reason to stay.

Phillip shouted, "What about Teresa? My legs—her death—that's all your fault! You owe us!"

Her body shook at the mention of Teresa. But then she remembered Jace dragging Phillip to take the test. He didn't have to. She could've done it. But he did it—to show her how to take her power back.

"You know why you were in that car," she said quietly. "If you think I'm guilty, ask the police to dig deeper. If I'm responsible, I'll face the consequences. Do you dare?"

Phillip fell silent. He wouldn't. The accident had haunted him, but the police had already ruled it an accident. No evidence pointed to Rhea. Nothing would change that.

She turned to the officers. "What now?"

"Drug rehab," they said.

Relief washed over her as they took him away.

But it wasn't over.

The next morning, the Seguin parents stormed in. Mrs. Seguin slapped her, hard.

"That's not a place for people!" she screamed. "Get him out, or you're finished!"

Mr. Seguin stood nearby, clearly taking Phillip's side.

The slap left a red mark on Rhea's pale skin. Mrs. Seguin stepped back—not out of guilt, but because something in Rhea's eyes rattled her.

"What's that look? You think I shouldn't have hit you?" she snapped.

"No," Rhea replied, her voice calm. "Actually, thank you."

The slap had snapped her out of the last illusion she had about family. Mrs. Seguin froze, caught off guard.

Rhea's gaze turned pitying. "I used to feel sorry for you. But now? I realize your misery is partly your own doing."

Mr. Seguin finally snapped. "Release my son!"

"I can't," Rhea replied coldly.

He raised his hand to hit her too—but Jace stepped in, grabbing his wrist. His expression was dark, ready to erupt.

"This isn't your playground," he growled. "Get out."

Mr. Seguin struggled but couldn't break free. He didn't know Jace once fought a lion bare-handed in Rome. A man like that could snap a wrist without blinking.

Jace gave one more shove. "I may not run the world, but I run this hospital. Leave, or you won't walk out."

It was a bluff—but Mr. Seguin believed it. Wincing, he backed off. The Seguins fled.

Rhea turned to Jace, overwhelmed. “Thank you, Dean. You saved me again. I don’t know how to repay you.”

He met her eyes. “Did you read the medical records I gave you?”

Thrown off by the sudden shift, she nodded. “Yeah.”

His expression softened. He asked what she thought, and she offered some bold ideas. The air eased. They talked, the tension melting into a rhythm that felt like... trust.

As she got excited, she caught herself. “Sorry, Dean. That was just my two cents—”

“I want you to lead the surgery,” he said.

## Chapter 904

Rhea froze.

Jace tilted his head. “What? Think you can’t handle it?”

She almost said no out of habit. But something inside her—ambition—refused. She hadn’t fought this hard for mediocrity. She’d earned every cent of that six million hustling side jobs. She’d always pushed herself.

After a beat, she said, “No. I can do it. I might stumble on other things, but not this.”

She’d studied this case forever. The rare condition made cells divide too fast, slowing aging. It was unheard of in hospitals—until now.

Jace smiled faintly. “Good. The surgery’s yours. But I’m not holding your hand.”

She nodded, bracing herself. The case was a media storm. A research team had been set up—but some members wanted to prioritize the research, not the patient. Jace had fought to treat both.

Now he was handing the reins to her.

“You’ve studied every case like this from around the world,” he said, flipping through documents.

She flushed. “Was I not supposed to?”

“That’s exactly why you’re the lead.” He handed her the full report. “Only half the data was public. Now you have everything.”

Rhea felt a mix of nerves and honor. Could she do this?

Jace seemed to sense it. "It's just data. Everyone on the team has seen it. Getting access doesn't mean you've earned the role."

She straightened. "I get that. I'll prove myself."

He met her eyes, then looked away. Something flickered in his expression.

She turned to leave but paused. "There are still rumors about me..."

"They're taken care of," he said.

Her eyes widened. "When?"

A rare smile softened his face. "A few days ago. I leaked Phillip's drug use."

Online, that kind of scandal was game over. With Phillip exposed, the rumors about her flipped. People who dragged her before were now dragging him.

But Rhea didn't care about the chatter. What mattered was that her name was cleared—and Jace had done it silently.

Words weren't enough. So she just said, "Dean, I won't let you down."

From then on, Rhea buried herself in work. Day and night, she studied the case. People thought she was obsessed.

Nurse Ofang peeked in. "Rhea, it's lunch. Aren't you eating?"

Rhea barely looked up. "Go ahead. I'll eat later."

Ofang glanced at her scribbled notes, baffled. "Hey... rumor is, the dean put you on the Tree of Life Project?"

Rhea froze. That project was top secret. She quickly covered the files. "How do you know that?"

Jace had warned her—some people were upset she got the role. Someone was leaking info to sabotage her.

Ofang held up her hands. "Don't ask me who told me!"

Rhea set her pen down. "Tell me what they're saying."

Ofang hesitated, then spilled. People said she wasn't qualified, that she didn't deserve the lead. Some even claimed Jace was backing her because they had something going on.

Worse, they were saying he had a kid.

## Chapter 905

The rumor about Jace having a kid hit Rhea like a stray thought. She suddenly pictured Norah and Cooper—but quickly brushed it off. Jace wasn't the type.

Ofang leaned in, lowering her voice. "At first, I didn't believe it. Dean's too serious. But I saw something."

Rhea's stomach twisted. "Saw what?"

"His kid," Ofang whispered, eyes sparkling.

"That's ridiculous," Rhea said sharply. "The dean doesn't have a kid. You must be mistaken."

Jace didn't even have a partner, let alone a child. The idea felt absurd.

Ofang, annoyed by her doubt, tugged Rhea's arm. "Come on. I'll show you."

She half-dragged Rhea down the hall and pointed. "That kid was with the dean this morning. Now he's with *her*. Maybe his wife?"

Rhea followed her gaze—and froze. Norah stood there, elegant as always, with Cooper beside her. Her heart sank, though she didn't know why.

Ofang nudged her. "People are talking. You're close to the dean—go ask her. She's heading to his office."

Rhea looked away from Norah. "Why would I? It's not my business. Even if it *is* true..." She trailed off, a sudden ache hitting her. *What right do I have to care?*

The thought rattled her—like missing a step in the dark. She forced it down, annoyed with herself. Ofang didn't catch on, still full of gossip. "Aren't you curious? Jace is a total mystery—gorgeous, rich, but never seen with anyone. And now this?"

Rhea grabbed a pen, trying to hide her discomfort. "I don't know anything. I met her once. She's just a friend."

Ofang deflated, disappointed by the bland answer. Rhea buried herself in work, trying to block out the noise in her head.

But Norah found her first. She knocked gently, smiling. "Miss Norah?" Rhea said, surprised.

Norah stepped in with Cooper, calm and graceful. "Sorry to drop in. I came to see Jace, but he's not around. You're the only other person I know here."

Her easy manner made Rhea fidget. “No trouble at all. You’re the dean’s friend—we should make you comfortable.”

But she had nothing. No tea, no snacks. Just two old oranges. She held them awkwardly, unsure if she should offer them.

“Sister, can I have one?” Cooper asked, saving her from the moment.

Rhea exhaled and handed one over, missing the clever look Cooper gave. He wasn’t just being cute.

Norah ruffled his hair. “Always hunting for snacks, huh? We didn’t come to raid the hospital’s pantry.”

Rhea laughed it off. The room grew quiet. Norah’s calm made Rhea feel small, like she was fading into the background.

“I should’ve prepared something,” Rhea murmured, glancing around. “Let me go grab—”

“No need,” Norah interrupted gently. “I just wanted to see a friend.”

Silence lingered. Rhea kept sneaking glances, fingers tightening with each look. Unbeknownst to her, Norah was watching too—quietly assessing her.

Norah’s smile deepened, something private flickering behind it. She tapped her phone under the table, texting quickly. “Truth is, I came for a selfish reason—to meet you.”

“Me?” Rhea blinked, confused. They hardly knew each other.

Norah caught her nerves with a small laugh. “Relax. I’m just curious. Jace’s friends always keep tabs on him—but you know how he is.”

She shrugged, and Rhea chuckled. “He’s not big on small talk.”

“But he’s solid,” she added. “He’s lucky to have a friend like you.”

The words slipped out, and she instantly regretted them. *Why did I say that? It’s not my place.*

Norah’s smile sharpened, like she’d noticed something. “Now I get why he stood up for you with Kevin.”

Rhea frowned, confused. But before she could ask, Norah stood and pulled Cooper up. She stole a piece of his orange, teasing, “What, your mom can’t have a bite?”

## Chapter 906

Rhea jumped up. “I’ll check for more—”

"Kidding," Norah laughed, flicking her hair back. She gave Rhea a warm smile and left.

Ofang swooped in, starry-eyed. "Now I get why people believe the rumors. She's gorgeous. If I were the dean, I'd be into her too."

Rhea's chest tightened, a quiet ache settling in. She didn't know why the idea of Jace with someone else hurt so much.

Sensing the vibe, Ofang let the gossip drop. The rumor died down, and a few nurses who spread it got fired. Ofang, grateful Rhea had warned her earlier, offered to buy her lunch. Rhea declined—it wasn't a big deal.

A nurse appeared. "Dr. Neufeld, the dean wants you."

Rhea's heart sped up. *Why now?* She packed up and headed over, knocking softly. "Dean, it's me. Can I come in?"

"Come in," Jace called, calm as ever.

He was buried in paperwork. His pale eyes lifted briefly, a small crease on his brow—something was bothering him. "Next time, don't knock. Just walk in. No rules here."

Rhea stared at that crease, distracted. He called her name again, snapping her back. "Sorry. Zoned out."

"You sleeping enough?" he asked.

Her cheeks warmed at his concern. It sent a soft glow through her. "Not really. The project's been intense. And the rumors—they're getting to me."

She hadn't meant to blurt that out. Jace's eyes darkened, a shadow crossing his face. "If Norah's visit upset you, I'm sorry. She felt bad for not asking first—she didn't have your number. She's been swamped, so she asked me to tell you."

The warmth inside her vanished. Cold took its place. Her hands clenched in her lap. *Of course. She matters. I don't.*

Self-loathing hit hard. *What am I doing?* He's been kind, but that doesn't mean anything. His personal life is none of my business.

She'd always been slow with people, but now it was clear—her feelings for Jace had grown past admiration. Panic bubbled up. She had to pull back.

Jace misunderstood her silence. "You okay? Just say what's on your mind. We'll deal with it."

His blunt kindness, once comforting, now terrified her. If he knew what she really felt, would he be disgusted?

She forced a smile. "Norah was lovely. We had a nice chat."

His expression softened, satisfied. She felt a stab of guilt. It was a lie—a half-truth to cover her tangled emotions. He didn't notice. He trusted her.

"Good," he said gently. "Sit. Check out this blood work."

Grateful for the change in topic, she leaned in. Her brow furrowed. "These numbers don't add up. Cell counts are way too high."

"That's the issue," Jace said, frustrated. "A month ago, we approved a reagent to slow cell division. Tested it on mice—looked safe. Then moved to the patient."

"Why treat it?" Rhea asked. "Isn't slower aging a *good* thing?"

Jace cut her off, reading her mind. "Not everyone wants to be stuck as a teenager forever." His glasses caught the light, eyes sharp and cold. "Some people reject the gift."

Her breath caught. Her pulse roared in her ears. She pressed a hand to her chest, trying to stay calm. Jace's focus stirred something in her—both awe and fear.

## Chapter 907

Jace's eyes locked on hers. "What's your take?"

Rhea shook her head. "I've got a theory—but I need to see the patient first. *You* taught me that."

Her excitement sparked. Jace's lips twitched, almost a smile. "Then grab your things. We're going."

Her jaw dropped. "Now?"

"You said you needed to see it firsthand," he teased. "Let's go."

She scrambled, gathering gloves and notes. Jace took the extras. "They've got gear there. Just bring your notes."

"Oh," she said, embarrassed. She was too excited to think straight.

The patient wasn't at a hospital—but at a sanatorium miles out. Except inside, it wasn't a clinic. It was a research institute. Cozy outside, high-security inside. No elderly patients—just researchers in sterile gear.

Jace flashed his badge. Rhea caught a glimpse—his ID photo, all angles and cold calm. He marched in. She hesitated.

“Keep up,” he said over his shoulder.

She rushed to catch up. The deeper they went, the more intense it felt—locked doors, tiered access. Jace had top clearance. She was impressed.

“You’re a big deal here?” she asked.

“Guest researcher,” he replied casually.

A man walked up, smirking. “Dr. Jace. Been a while. Forgot about us?”

His tone was smug. Jace ignored the handshake. “Move, Iker. Not here to chat.”

Iker’s eyes landed on Rhea. “Giving your assistant a tour? Should’ve called me. I’m a great guide. Or lend her to me—I’ve got reports to read.”

“She’s *mine*,” Jace said, voice sharp. “She doesn’t need babysitting.”

Iker’s smile faded. “Protective, aren’t we?”

Jace walked past. Rhea followed.

Iker muttered, “Hope she’s worth the trouble.”

Rhea paused, turned back. “You’ll see.”

He looked surprised. She ignored him and stepped into the elevator. Her heart pounded—she’d stood her ground.

They reached a small ward. A young patient moved in a confined space—just from bed to bathroom. No phone. No TV. Just books. Red cameras blinked from every corner.

Rhea watched on the monitor, disturbed. “They’re keeping him like this? He’ll lose it.”

“Team’s decision,” Jace said flatly. He hadn’t voted. He was outvoted by people claiming UV from screens might interfere with his cells.

“That’s nonsense,” she snapped. “This isn’t healing—it’s prison.”

She wanted to fight it—but pushing back would ruin her career and pull Jace down too. He nodded at her frustration. “Nail the surgery, and he walks free.”

Her resolve sharpened. *Right. That’s what I can do.*

But access hit a snag. A researcher entered awkwardly. “Dr. Jace, Dr. Iker blocked the application.”

“Iker?” Rhea whispered.

Jace signaled *later*, then turned cold. “Iker and I are equals. Since when does he block patients?”

The researcher looked uncomfortable. “He’s Mr. Lussier’s protégé...”

Jace’s sneer cut deep. “Tree of Life’s charter says we’re all researchers—no special titles. Or did I miss the memo that it’s now *Lussier Inc.*? ”

## Chapter 908

The researcher, sweating under pressure, gave in. They got access.

Rhea whispered, “Dr. Iker and Mr. Lussier?”

“Jacob Lussier,” Jace confirmed. “You’ve met him. Dual-specialty doctor, studied overseas. Lussier’s his mentor—a medical giant who’s lectured at Cambridge and Yale.”

Her pulse quickened. “Jacob Lussier?”

He nodded. “Big fan?”

She couldn’t hide her excitement, though Jace’s earlier tension made her wonder if he didn’t get along with them. Before she could explain, he just shrugged. “Makes sense. Lussier’s a legend.”

He walked off, leaving behind a chill. Was he annoyed? No—Jace wasn’t the type to get petty over small talk. She brushed it off and followed him.

The patient stunned her. At a glance, he looked like a teenager—pale skin, white hair, almost otherworldly.

“You’re... albino?” she asked, surprised.

He smiled, unfazed. She quickly added, “No offense! You’re just... beautiful.”

“Thanks,” he said, putting down his book. “You’re the second person to say that.”

She blinked. “Who was the first?”

He nodded toward Jace, who was preparing a syringe. Rhea watched as Jace drew blood, his usually sharp features softened with care. For a moment, she saw past his cold exterior—there was warmth there.

The test results came back bad. Jace’s brows furrowed—his tell for stress.

“Worse than before,” he muttered.

The boy’s smile faded. “It’s spreading?”

“Too fast,” Jace said, rubbing his temples. The surgery was already risky, and this only made it worse.

Rhea tried to lift the mood. “We’ll figure it out. You’ve dealt with albinism your whole life—you’ll get through this too.”

The boy grinned. “Guess how old I am.”

“Twenty?” she guessed, thinking maybe he just aged slower.

“Thirty-five.”

Her jaw dropped. He looked younger than her. He’d even been a CEO once, driven by family pressure and the fear of becoming a “monster.”

Shaken, Rhea followed Jace out.

“Surgery’s pushed back two weeks,” he said, phone in hand, voice cold. He’d fought for that delay.

“You pulled strings?” she asked.

He didn’t answer. But she understood—this surgery was a chess match. Success meant freedom. Failure meant more experiments, more confinement.

“They’re just locking him away again,” she said bitterly.

And it was true. The man’s youthful look was a curse, surrounded by gossip, fear, and isolation. She made a silent vow to find answers.

Back at the hospital, Rhea buried herself in research. She uncovered a haunting case: a girl who had died long ago, yet her cells still lived on in labs.

This patient’s case wasn’t as extreme—and he had someone in his corner like Jace.

But the long hours took a toll. Rhea collapsed from low blood sugar and anemia.

When she woke up, Jace was standing over her, snatching her notes.

“Two days. You rest. I gave you a shot, not a death sentence.”

**Chapter 909**

Drained, Rhea just wanted to sleep. She made some instant noodles, scarfed them down, showered, and collapsed into bed.

But loud knocking shattered the peace. It wouldn't stop. Half-asleep, she assumed it was a delivery—until she opened the door and saw Phillip. In a wheelchair.

Her instincts kicked in—she slammed the door shut.

"Nothing to say now that you see me?" Phillip asked, forcing his hand through the crack, stopping her from closing it completely.

His grip tightened. "Let me in. I just want to talk."

She wasn't buying it. Letting him in would trap her. "There's nothing to talk about," she said coldly.

"Dad's sick. Got discharged last night. I'm here to ask you to visit him," Phillip rushed out.

For a second, her resolve wavered—Mr. Seguin was sick? But the memories of their cruelty came back strong.

"I've paid everything I owed. If he's sick, you take care of him. Leave me alone."

She knew their game—lure her back, lock her in. She'd escaped once. She wasn't going back.

"Rhea!" Phillip snapped, his face twisted in frustration.

She pointed behind him. "What's that?"

As he turned to look, she slammed the door and locked it. He banged on it, shouting, "Open the damn door!"

She stayed silent, hoping he'd give up. Instead, his shouting woke the neighbors.

"Leave already or I'm calling the cops!" one neighbor barked.

"Go ahead," Phillip snapped. "She's my sister. This is family business."

He knew how it looked—wheelchair-bound, talking about family. The cops wouldn't arrest him. He could play the victim and fish for sympathy—and maybe even money.

"Just let your brother in and talk," a neighbor pleaded. "We need sleep."

Rhea felt crushed. The Seguin family's shadow always caught up to her. But not this time. She called the police.

They arrived fast and took them both to the station.

The officers tried reasoning with Phillip. "Look, we get you want your sister home. But she's grown. Respect her space. You caused a scene."

"I'm sorry, officer. My dad's really sick. I just got desperate," Phillip said, acting all pitiful.

It chilled Rhea. His act was so believable.

To the officer, she lied. "It's not that I won't go. I'm just tired, and tickets are hard to get."

She needed time to come up with a plan. He'd found her home—he'd be back.

The police mediated. Phillip backed off—for now. But his parting words stuck with her:

"Rest up. I'll see you soon."

It wasn't concern. It was a threat.

Instead of going home, Rhea went straight to the bar where she'd worked part-time.

"Do you have staff dorms?" she asked the manager. "What's the rent?"

"We've got dorms. Free, if you work at least fifteen shifts a month."

"I'll start tonight."

She didn't hesitate. Hiding from Phillip mattered more than sleep. Plus, the pay wasn't bad.

The manager explained the deal—base pay plus commission, bonuses for top sellers. She packed a few things from home, moved into the dorm, got a quick nap, and dressed for work.

The bar buzzed with noise and nightlife. Her job was to sell drinks, but some customers thought they were buying more than booze.

One guy sneered, "How much do I need to spend to get you for the night?"

## Chapter 910

Rhea's expression turned cold. She needed the money—but not like this.

"Sir, I'm a waitress. I sell drinks, not myself," she said, calm but firm.

The man sneered. "Don't act all pure. Ask your manager who Brother Liu is—I can buy you out."

She forced a tight smile and pushed her cart away. Avoiding conflict was best—for now.

But the man, drunk and angry, yanked her arm. “I drop two hundred grand here every year. You think you’re too good for me?”

“Sir, that’s not my—”

“Drop the act! You’re already selling yourself!”

Tears welled up. Life kept beating her down.

“You’re crying? I came here to have fun, and you’re ruining it!” he shouted, gripping tighter.

The commotion drew the manager. Instead of helping her, he snapped, “They want you to sit and drink—just do it. Don’t start fights.”

Rhea stayed quiet, bowing her head. There was no point arguing. The manager only cared about money.

He turned to the customer. “Sorry, she’s new. Drinks are on the house tonight. I’ll send other girls over.”

“I want *her*,” the man growled, slamming his membership card down. “If she doesn’t sit, you’re insulting me.”

The manager glared at Rhea. “You brought this on yourself.”

Then, a voice cut through the tension.

“What is this, the Middle Ages? Still forcing women?”

Jace walked in, stepping between her and the man. His presence was like a wall shielding her.

The man squinted. “Who are you? I’m a VIP. You see this Ace of Spades? Get lost.”

He thought Jace was just some drunk hero.

“You want to play knight? Look at yourself.”

Jace didn’t even respond to the insult—just looked at the man like he was pathetic. “Rhea, go get the manager,” he said.

She ran. Behind her, the man, humiliated, threw a punch.

Jace caught it—and knocked him flat. One hit. The guy hit the floor hard.

By the time the manager came back, the man’s face was already bruising.

"You okay? Want an ambulance?" the manager asked, panicking.

"Kick them out!" the man roared.

But now the manager hesitated. Sure, the drunk spent big—but Jace was tied to even bigger fish.

"You're drunk. Go upstairs and cool off," the manager said, his tone changed.

"I'm not resting! I want her to drink with me!"

"Get him out of here," the manager told the staff. "Call an ambulance."

The man fought, but they dragged him out. The manager turned to Jace, about to explain, but Jace cut him off.

"She's coming with me. Private room. That a problem?"

"No, no problem," the manager muttered, not wanting more trouble.

In the room, Jace faced her. "Why are you here? Broke?"

She nodded. "Yeah. I wouldn't be doing this otherwise."

Jace frowned. "How much do you need? Say it. I'll cover it."