

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Novel - Chapter 1

Chapter 1

The faint sound of running water echoed from the bathroom; Vance Bradford was taking a shower. It was three in the morning, and he had just returned home. Rebecca Perry stood at the bathroom door, her heart pounding. There was something she wanted to discuss with him, but she felt nervous, unsure if he would agree once he heard it. As she pondered how to broach the subject, a strange noise came from inside. She listened closely and realized he was pleasuring himself. The heavy breaths and muffled groans struck her like hammers, pounding relentlessly at her chest.

Bitterness surged through her like a tidal wave, leaving her gasping for air, drowning in agony. Today marked their fifth wedding anniversary, yet they had never consummated their marriage. So, this was why. He'd rather take care of himself than touch her. His breathing grew more frantic, and suddenly, in a moment of intense release, he groaned lowly, "Catherine..." That name delivered the final, crushing blow. Something inside her shattered into dust.

She clamped a hand over her mouth to stifle her sobs and turned to flee, but in her haste, she stumbled, crashing into the sink and tumbling to the floor. "Rebecca, is that you?" Vance's voice, still ragged from exertion, carried a note of forced composure, though his breathing remained heavy. "I-I needed the bathroom. I didn't know you were showering," she stammered, desperately grabbing the sink to pull herself up. But in her panic, she made things worse. Water slicked the floor and countertop, making it impossible to find her footing. She finally managed to stand just as Vance emerged.

His white bathrobe was hastily thrown on, the belt cinched tightly around his waist. "Did you fall? Let me help you," he said, reaching out to lift her. Tears brimmed in her eyes from the pain, but she pushed his hand away, stubborn and resolute. "No need. I can manage myself." She steadied herself but nearly slipped again. Limping awkwardly, she fled back to the bedroom-a hasty escape from the awkward scene. For five years, she had been hiding from the outside world, from the judgmental stares, and from Vance's sympathy.

She was ashamed of her condition, though she used to have strong, beautiful legs before the accident. She always felt inferior. A cripple like her didn't deserve someone as accomplished and luminous as Vance Bradford. Vance followed her, his tone gentle and concerned. "Does it hurt? Let me check." "It's nothing." She burrowed under the covers, hiding her embarrassment along with her body. "Are you sure?" His worry seemed genuine. "Yeah." She nodded, showing her back to him. "Then get some sleep. Don't you want to use the bathroom anymore?" "Nope, let's just rest." "Alright.

Oh, it's our anniversary today. I got you a gift. Open it tomorrow and see if you like it." "Okay." The gift sat on the nightstand; she had already spotted it. She didn't need to unwrap it to know what was inside. Every year, it was the same-sized box containing an identical watch. Her drawer already held nine of them, including birthday gifts. This would be the tenth. The conversation ended. Vance switched off the light and lay down. The air was filled with the damp, fresh scent of his shower gel, but she barely felt the mattress dip under his weight.

The bed was giant, but they lay far apart, each on one edge. The space between them could fit three more people. As if by tacit understanding, neither of them mentioned Catherine Welch or what had transpired in the bathroom. Rebecca lay rigid on her back, her eyes stinging fiercely. Catherine was Vance's college classmate, his first love, and his goddess. After graduation, she had gone abroad, leading to their breakup and his depression. He had spiraled into despair, drinking heavily every day. Rebecca and Vance, however, were classmates in high school.

She had harbored a secret crush on him back then. He was the campus heartthrob and an aloof, top student, while she spent most of her time in a dance studio far from the spotlight. She was pretty enough, but she was quiet, never one to stand at the center of things, and in a school full of confident, outspoken girls, she was easy to overlook. So, her feelings had remained her private secret; she never dreamed of approaching him. That changed after she graduated from the dance academy and returned home for summer break, encountering him in his broken state.

He was heavily drunk that night, weaving erratically down the street. As he crossed the road without checking the lights, a car barreled toward him, unable to brake in time. She had been trailing him out of concern and shoved him aside—just in time for the car to strike her instead. At that time, she had secured a spot in graduate school, but the accident left her crippled. She could never dance again. Afterward, he quit drinking and married her. He remained forever indebted, forever grateful, soft-spoken and distant. He showered her with gifts and money, but never with love.

She had believed time could heal everything and soften the edges of her pain. Yet after five years, he still clung to Catherine so deeply that even in his most private moments, it was her name he uttered. She had been foolish and naïve. She lay awake all night, checking an email on her phone over a hundred times. It was an offer from a foreign university for graduate studies—the very thing she had planned to discuss with him that evening. But now, there was no need to consult him. Their five-year marriage, filled with countless sleepless nights, could finally begin its countdown.

When he rose in the morning, she feigned sleep, overhearing him speak to the housekeeper, Nancy. "I have a business dinner tonight. Tell Rebecca not to wait up; she should rest early." After his instructions, he returned to the bedroom to check on her. She hid under the covers, her pillow soaked with tears. Normally, she would prepare his outfit for work, laying it out neatly. But not today. He dressed himself in the walk-in closet and left for the office. Only then did she open her eyes, feeling them swollen and sore.

Her phone alarm buzzed-the daily reminder she had set for herself to study. Since the marriage, her leg had confined her to the house most of the time. To pass the endless hours, she divided her days into segments, filling each with small tasks. She silenced the alarm and mindlessly scrolled through apps. Her mind was a jumble, unable to focus on anything, until she saw a familiar face in a video. It was posted just the night before, and the account name was Cathy W. The algorithm was really uncanny, delivering this right before her eyes.

Rebecca tapped on the video, and lively music played, followed by voices shouting, "Three, two, one! Welcome back, Catherine! Cheers!" One voice stood out-Vance's.

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