

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 101

In the past, Josette would have laughed and said, “Silly child, I am Rebecca’s grandmother and yours too.

She had always known that Rebecca’s marriage was troubled, but she believed in empathy. If one treated the others well, they would eventually reciprocate the kindness.

But now she saw the truth: Rebecca was unhappy, always trying to hide it behind a brave smile. Having raised Rebecca with great care, Josette could see right through her façade.

Josette could no longer bring herself to say that. She sighed under her breath, hearing Vance stacking the clean dishes.

“We’ll get a dishwasher installed for you,” he suggested.

Josette snapped out of it, chuckling, “It’s fine. No need to go to all that trouble.”

“No trouble at all,” he said. “Even though we’ll move into the new house soon, the renovations will take months. My own grandmother is gone, but I still have you.”

Rebecca felt like a faint sourness bloomed in the air, as if an invisible hand had crushed a lemon and rubbed the juice straight into her heart. The ache was sharp and bitterly familiar.

It was the same sting she had felt years ago: the sunset when Vance’s family hurled a stack of money at his face; the defiant laugh he gave while the light bled behind him, saying he would rather be kept than take their charity; the black armband on his sleeve when she found him after three days of skipping class; the day he returned to school and whispered, “My grandmother passed away,” and the pain flooded her like a tide.

The last time the ache had struck so hard was when Catherine left the country. He told her that his only support had collapsed.

Countless times, her heart had hurt for him. She knew that beneath his brilliant exterior, he bore so much shame he didn’t want anyone to see.

During Halloween, every classmate complained about pumpkin pies yet hurried home anyway to eat them with family.

She went to Josette’s place, but Vance had nowhere to go.

After dinner, she returned to school, where the osmanthus flowers bloomed with a fragrant intensity. She met him on the path and slowed without thinking. He slowed too.

She handed him a pumpkin pie that was handmade by Josette.

That night, they sat together under the osmanthus tree and ate in silence. The moon was round and bright; the sky held no stars, but the fireflies danced among the branches, each one bright as a star.

When they finished, he headed to the classroom, and she returned to the dormitory. Turning back, she caught sight of his tall, solitary figure. That night, the ache softened into something bittersweet, wrapping around her like a thread.

All those heartaches had finally braided into courage. So, despite the four years of separation in college, when he proposed to her upon graduation, she said yes without hesitation.

Online, she used to come upon phrases like, “Loving a doomed man will curse you for life.”

She didn’t understand it until now. Loving Vance was indeed painful, but thankfully, it was still not too late.

“Are you taking a nap?” Vance asked Josette as they stepped out of the kitchen together.

Josette snapped out of it and shook her head. “I’ll walk around a little first.”

“Then let’s play a few hands of poker,” he suggested.

“You’re not leaving?” Rebecca asked, surprised.

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“Grandma,” Vance whined, putting on an exaggerated pitiful face. “Rebecca is trying to kick me out. She’s so mean.”

Rebecca blinked, unsure what games he was playing.

Josette burst into laughter. “Silly boy, she knows how busy you are and doesn’t want to take up your time.

“I

“No worries. I’m on vacation,” he replied, producing a deck of cards from nowhere.

Rebecca couldn’t believe he really meant to play poker with Josette, even inviting her to join in. They played for an hour until both women grew drowsy and called it quits for afternoon naps.

Rebecca had no idea whether Vance usually napped; he rarely came home for lunch and always seemed tireless.

She slept until four. When she woke up, voices drifted from outside. Listening closely, she realized it was

Vance and Josette.

To her surprise, he was still there. She got out of bed and stepped into the yard, where Vance was helping Josette set up a trellis for the climbing roses.

With warmer weather, the rose branches had started to grow wildly. All they needed was a structure to climb and flourish into a beautiful wall of blooms.

His sleeves were rolled to the elbows. His pants and shoes were splattered with mud. The frame was already up, and he was carefully tying the branches into place.

The sun at 4 p.m. was still fierce. Dampened by sweat, his hair lay messily across his forehead.

“It’s hot out here, Grandma. You should go inside. I can handle this myself,” he said, revealing several scratches on his arms.

Worried about Josette getting overheated, Rebecca called out from the steps, “Grandma, come back up.”

Vance turned at her voice and pointed at her feet. “Don’t step into the mud. Just stay there. I’m almost done.”

Yet, what he claimed would only take a moment ended up consuming another half-hour. When he finally came inside, every trace of the polished CEO had vanished.

His shirt was streaked with dirt, his face smudged. His arms and hands were crisscrossed with thorn and bamboo scratches. His pants and shoes, though rinsed, were wet and filthy.

He looked exactly like the soot-covered boy from that long-ago picnic. If none of the last two weeks had happened and if life could have stayed this simple, she might have been perfectly content.

Unfortunately...

She shook the idea out of her head. There was nothing to regret. It was better this way—better to see the truth of their marriage early.

“Why are you staring?” He flicked a muddy fingertip at her nose.

She jerked back. “Hey, it’s dirty.”

“Now you find me dirty?” His eyes, bright from the afternoon’s labor, sparkled. “When I’m old and ugly, you’ll despise me completely, won’t you?”

“No,” she replied. Because they would not grow old together.

Misinterpreting, he tapped her nose again and smiled. “You’ve got a bit of conscience after all.”

“Vance, go take a shower,” Josette called out. “There are clean clothes ready. Rebecca, help him fetch them.”

She nodded, not because she wanted to, but because it would be rude to let him stay filthy in Josette’s house. She didn’t want to argue with him there, tarnishing the remaining few days she had to spend with

Josette.

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The men’s clothes in Josette’s closet were five years old but still brand-new. Rebecca had bought them herself.

The countryside nights were serene, filled with the sounds of insects and the fragrance of flowers. On clear nights, the Milky Way could be seen stretching across the sky.

During the early days of her marriage, Rebecca had once imagined bringing Vance here, spending quiet countryside nights together, and telling Josette she had found her true love.

So, she had prepared clothes, washed them, and left them waiting. Five years, and he had never once stayed the night.

He was particular about clothing. When she handed him the clothes, he recognized at once that they were meant for him. Yet, the styles were outdated, so he held back the words at the tip of his tongue.

Rebecca said nothing and walked past him.

That evening, they were preparing a feast. Earlier during their nap, Vance had gotten the ingredients ready. Now Josette just needed to cook them.

Rebecca hovered at the kitchen door, eager to help, but Josette shooed her away. She smiled helplessly, knowing Josette never let her lift a finger.

So, she returned to the living room and started tidying up the table.

Her phone vibrated just then. She sat down on the sofa and checked it out. The message was from Lauren, asking her to confirm flight details for the troupe.

After replying, she chatted casually with Lauren for half an hour.

Vance emerged from the bathroom. She quickly ended the conversation and swiped left to delete every message, which didn't escape his eyes.

"What did you delete?" He walked closer in a T-shirt and sweatpants, his hair still damp.

"Nothing." She shrugged, locking the screen.

Unconvinced, he reached out his hand. "Give me the phone."

"No," she protested, "you have no right to interfere in who I talk to."

"Is that so?" He sat down next to her, invading her space.

Anticipating his attempt to snatch her phone, she got up to leave. Before she could, he caught her waist and pulled her back down.

"Don't go crazy here!" She struggled, gripping the phone.

He knew she would never make a scene there and make Josette worry. That knowledge gave him permission.

“Let me go!” Unable to break free, she bit him on the shoulder.

“Damn it!” he hissed, but his grip never loosened.

His fingers inadvertently brushed the phone, and she glared at him, silently negotiating. Yet instead of releasing her, he tightened his hold, placed one hand on the back of her head, and leaned in to kiss her-

first on her ear, then on her cheek.

With no choice, she loosened her bite and glanced at the kitchen. “Have you no shame?”

Knowing her worries, he pressed closer to her lips, whispering, “What’s shameful about this? What if

Josette sees this? You’re my wife.”

Irritated, she slapped him and pushed him away. But in doing so, she relaxed her grip on her phone, allowing him to snatch it from her hand.

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The slap didn’t force Vance to release her.

Instead, he pressed closer, held the phone up to her face, unlocked it, and began scrolling. When he found nothing, he glanced at her and typed in “Des” to pull up Desmond’s profile.

Tossing the phone back, he sneered, “What was so shameful you had to delete everything? Even the friend request?”

She had deleted the chat record altogether because they mentioned going abroad.

“Speak!” he demanded.

Rebecca nodded slowly.

He leaned in closer, narrowing his eyes. “What does that mean?”

“Yes, I deleted them,” she admitted, meeting his eyes calmly.

His jaw tightened as he fought to control his anger. “And you’re so proud of it? What exactly did you delete?”

“What else?” She shrugged. “Things I didn’t want you to know. Why would I tell you?”

“You...” His chest heaved with anger.

From the day he started his company, he had climbed straight to the top, issuing orders and never meeting resistance. No one had ever defied him like this.

“Great!” He gritted his teeth. “I’ve survived every enemy outside, but you might be the one who kills me one day.”

His voice was low, almost a whisper, so that Josette would not hear it.

“Guess I misjudged you!” He swept her up and carried her toward the door.

“Put me down! I’m not going home!” she protested. “I’m staying with Josette!”

Outside, he set her on her feet. “Talk! She can’t hear you here.”

His fury needed to be released.

Unfazed, she leaned against the wall. “I have nothing to say. It’s just how it is. Who I chat with and what we say is none of your business.”

“So high and mighty,” he said through clenched teeth. “What kind of ungrateful creature are you?”

“Living off you and turning against you?” She anticipated what he was going to say next.

He meant that he had given her all the best, and she had betrayed him in return.

“Dinner’s ready!” Josette called out, approaching. “What are you guys doing out there?”

Vance’s hands were on either side of Rebecca’s head, blocking her escape. When Josette’s voice drifted over, he pulled her closer and lowered his mouth.

She turned her face away, and his lips brushed against her cheek. Josette appeared at just the right moment to witness this scene.

Vance pretended to be startled. “Eh... Nothing. We were doing nothing.”

This was the first time Rebecca had been caught in such an intimate moment with Vance in any intimate situation, forced though it was. That made her blush with embarrassment.

“Dinner is ready. I’ll set the table.” Josette waved it off, going back inside.

Vance gripped Rebecca’s arm. “You’ll see that betraying me comes with a price.”

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Rebecca didn’t bother deciphering the threat.

Vance’s outbursts had grown frequent lately. He would randomly throw out harsh remarks, but that didn’t bother her.

Fear usually arose from love. During the five years of their marriage, her greatest fear had been him not loving her.

Reality confirmed he truly didn’t. As the day came when she acknowledged this, it didn’t seem to matter much anymore because she no longer loved him. It turned out she could survive without that love.

Dinner was almost uneventful. Vance had a hearty appetite, devouring the spicy shrimp that Josette had prepared just the way he liked. He scraped the last bits of spicy garlic, finishing every morsel before slurping down a bowl of clam chowder.

Leaning back in his chair, he burped. “No Michelin restaurant in the world can match Josette’s cooking.”

While his statement sounded exaggerated, there was a kernel of truth. He genuinely loved her food.

“Grandma, you must move in with us,” he said. “Knowing your love for gardening, we bought a villa with gardens in the front and the back. You can plant whatever you like.”

“I’d turn your beautiful house into a mess,” Josette chuckled. “What would your important guests think?”

“They’d think we’re lucky to have a treasure in the house,” he said smoothly. “You don’t know how much Rebecca and I hope you can stay with us. And when we have a baby, we’ll need you to help raise him.”

Rebecca’s spoon jerked. The soup spilled and went down the wrong pipe, causing her to cough uncontrollably.

Vance patted her back, looking down at her flushed face. “Five years married, you still eat like a child. I honestly don’t know how you’d survive without me.”

The warning was clear: she was hobbled and unable to care for herself. She’d be helpless without him. As for the baby? He was thinking wildly.

Josette glanced at Rebecca and sighed softly.

“If you’re finished, go home,” Rebecca said.

Vance frowned, fighting to restrain his anger in front of Josette. “Why do you keep trying to chase me away?”

“Because...” Rebecca caught herself.

She hadn’t gone to her therapy session yet. The doctor had been out on rounds and could only see her at 5:30. Now she was running late.

Since returning from Arelmoor, Vance hadn’t once asked about her condition or whether there was still hope. Since he didn’t inquire, she decided not to mention it.

That was for the best. No more worries for each other.

Her phone buzzed just then. It was a message from the doctor, explaining he was finally done with his rounds and preparing to head back. But he would arrive later than promised.

Rebecca replied: [I’m at Syliaview, so it will take me a while to get there.]

Syliaview was where Josette lived.

Edwin Jefferson: [You don’t need to come to the clinic. I’m just miles away. Send me your location, and I’ll come to find you.]

Rebecca glanced at Vance, feeling a bit frustrated. It seemed he was staying for the night. Why hadn’t Catherine called him away yet?

Now it was hard to hide her secret. Whether the doctor came to her or she went to the clinic, Vance would inevitably find out.

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Deciding to go with the flow, Rebecca sent her location to the doctor.

“Who are you texting?” Vance asked, his radar on.

Rebecca ignored him and stood up to clean the table. “Grandma, did you save any dishes?”

Every time she visited, Josette would make a lot of dishes, often setting aside a plate of something substantial.

“Stewed chicken and beef brisket,” Josette replied.

“Perfect. We have a guest coming soon,” Rebecca explained. “He probably hasn’t had dinner yet.”

“Well, I’ll make more,” Josette said, heading to the kitchen.

Vance’s eyes narrowed. “Who’s coming?”

She shrugged. “Someone you don’t know.”

“Who among your acquaintances wouldn’t I know?” he snorted, unconvinced. “I’ve known you since we were 15.”

That was Vance, thinking he knew everything. They hadn’t been to the same college, so he didn’t even know her dance academy classmates.

But she continued to clean the table instead of arguing with him. He pulled her back down and began to tidy up. “Sit and rest.”

She let him do it and stepped outside. Even though she had sent her location, there was no guarantee the doctor would find it.

After clearing the table, Vance stepped out to see her standing at the gate, leaning against the bricks. Her hair was casually tied back in a ponytail, and she wore a simple white T-shirt.

For a moment, time seemed to rewind to their high school days.

“Who are you waiting for?” He approached her with a stern face, but she seemed not to hear him, standing on her tiptoes and staring ahead.

Before long, a car drove toward them. She waved energetically, smiling brightly.

He watched, furrowing his brow. “Rebecca...”

She ignored him and walked toward the car. Stepping out of it was a man in his thirties, gentle and refined. He flashed a polite smile, and she smiled back.

Vance’s face darkened at their exchange, and he blocked the doorway as Rebecca showed Edwin inside.

Rebecca forced a smile, introducing them to each other. “This is Mr. Bradford, and this is Dr. Jefferson, here to give me therapy sessions.”

Vance’s tense expression cracked. “A doctor? Therapy sessions? You...”

He stepped aside at once. “Dr. Jefferson, please come in. I apologize for my rudeness. I didn’t know you were coming, or else I would have come to welcome you.”

Edwin nodded with a smile. “No problem at all. I was passing by after doing some free consultations in the area.”

The two of them walked ahead, with Rebecca following. Josette had finished cooking the dishes and set the table. She was overjoyed to learn that the visitor was there to give Rebecca therapy sessions.

They insisted that Edwin eat first, finally convincing him. After a quick meal and a short rest, he began the treatment.

The others held their breath, afraid of interrupting him. Once it was done, Rebecca lay resting, while Vance accompanied Edwin outside for tea.

Rebecca heard their whispers but could not make out what they were saying.

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Once their conversation ended, Vance saw Edwin off.

By the time he returned, night had fallen. For the first time in five years, he stayed at Josette's house, sharing the narrow single bed in Rebecca's old childhood room.

There were other rooms, including those where Rebecca's parents and brother had once lived. Yet he insisted on staying in her room.

"My room is too small. You could go to..." she started.

"What do you think?" he interrupted.

She fell silent, aware of his obsessive cleanliness. Besides, he had never liked her parents or Emmett. It was the lesser of two evils.

She sighed and lay down, letting him be.

Vance sat on the edge of her bed. "Mrs. Bradford, how many things are you hiding from me?"

Whenever he called her Mrs. Bradford, his tone would drip with sarcasm. He never bothered to sit down and have a nice talk with her.

She mentally counted her secrets. There were quite a few, and she had no idea which one he was referring to.

"How do you know this doctor?" he asked. "You get treated by him every day, and you didn't even tell me?"

She remained silent, and he pressed on. "I just talked to him. He said your leg needs daily massages. You didn't tell me or Josette, so who is going to do that for you?"

She was relieved that he still didn't know about her seeking studies abroad, but it was only a matter of time before he found out. The thought of him sabotaging her plans made her uneasy.

"Now you won't answer any questions, will you?" he added.

A rustling reached her ears as his hands suddenly slid up her pajama pants. She instinctively curled up, hugging her knees.

His hands were slick with ointment, and the faint scent of medicine filled the air. "I'm going to give you a massage. Dr. Jefferson gave me another bottle of medicine."

He extended a hand toward her, but she pulled her pants back down. "No need."

"Rebecca," he said slowly, "you can be willful about many things, but this is serious."

She wasn't being willful. She simply didn't want to expose her scars again.

After her injury, when she underwent rehabilitation, she needed daily massages for her leg. He had been there to help her, yet he had never looked at her leg.

His eyes were always somewhere else, while his fingers pressed down on her skin. She knew he loathed those scars, but he didn't realize that his disgust only inflicted a deeper wound.

It was like the car running over her again, tearing her heart apart.

Five years had passed, and her wounds had healed, scabbing over. She didn't want to reopen them, nor did she want to remind herself of the pain she had worked so hard to suppress.

"Dr. Jefferson said there's still hope. Let's try again, okay?" he said, gently gripping her ankle.

She instinctively recoiled, but he held on. "To honor his dedication. Dr. Jefferson came all the way here to treat you. Let's make one more effort, shall we?"

He forcefully pushed her pant leg back up, his oiled fingers pressing against her leg. She turned her face away, not wanting to see the look of disdain in his eyes or the way he would look away from her.

By not watching him, she would hurt less.

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Vance's massage skills were superb; the pressure was strong and precise.

Despite his reluctance, his conscience had compelled him to help Rebecca during her initial recovery phase. Now, as he resumed this old task, he found that his skills hadn't faded.

Half an hour later, she started to nod off. He covered her with a blanket and jolted her awake. That was when she realized he had finished the job.

"I'm going to wash my hands," he said, his fingers covered with ointment.

Rebecca turned over, facing the wall, and settled back down to sleep. He returned quickly and lay down behind her. The bed was small, and he pressed closely against her.

Instinctively, she shifted toward the inner side of the bed, but he wrapped his arm around her waist. “Not asleep yet?”

She had almost fallen asleep, woken up only by his series of actions.

“I am.”

“And you’re still talking.”

He pressed closer to her. “Let me tell you something. Don’t laugh.”

What on earth could he share that would make her laugh?

“I was pretty silly as a kid. Before bed, I’d secretly play video games-consoles,” he started. “Did you girls play those? When my grandma found out I wasn’t asleep, she’d come check on me, saying, ‘When children are asleep, their mouths are open. If not, they’re pretending.’ So, I started sleeping with my mouth wide open. She laughed about it until I was ten.”

Rebecca didn’t laugh, but this was the longest conversation he had ever started in five years. In the past, she had been the one trying desperately to engage him, to bridge the gap between them.

He would respond with short answers or simple silence. Looking back, she felt like a clown, performing tirelessly in front of him.

She closed her eyes and lay still, just as she had done during those thousand-plus days, when she had tried so hard to entertain him, only to receive indifference in return.

She thought that would dampen his spirit and make him stop. But his hand that was resting on her waist suddenly slipped under her shirt.

Panic surged through her, and she quickly pressed down on his hand.

“Rebecca,” he whispered, “should we continue what we started this morning? About having a baby?”

His hand heated up and moved upward. She struggled, trying to pull it away. “No!”

“Why not? Didn’t you want children before?” He rolled on top of her, pinning her down.

If he had done this before their fifth anniversary, she would have been overjoyed. But now, all she felt was bitter irony.

He knew everything, understanding how much she had wanted a child and how deeply she had loved him. Yet he had never wanted to have kids with her or love her.

Now his actions were baffling. He leaned close to bite her earlobe, his breath hot and rapid.

She tried to escape, but he clung to her tightly. Since they were at Josette's place, she couldn't make a noise. And with the disparity in their strength, she couldn't budge him.

His warm breath traveled across her cheek and neck. She felt trapped, anxiety rising in her chest. Was she really going to be forced into this with him before leaving?

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No, absolutely not!

Rebecca fought with all her might, and the only weapon she had left was her teeth. She bit down hard on Vance's shoulder, feeling him loosen his grip.

Seizing the moment, she rolled over and gasped for breath. Because the bed was too small, he tumbled off onto the floor, staring at her with an unreadable expression.

She swung her legs off the bed, intending to go to Josette's room, but he caught her ankle. "Where are you going?"

She struggled, unwilling to stay there for another second. He took a deep breath and calmed down." Okay, I won't touch you."

He tried to de-escalate the situation, but she remained tense.

"I promise," he added.

Footsteps came from the hallway. It was Josette who had heard the noise. "Rebecca, is anything wrong?"

"It's nothing. I just fell off the bed," Vance said smoothly. "The bed is too small."

"Rebecca, why don't you come sleep with me?" Josette suggested.

Catching the implication, Rebecca tried to go out, but Vance held her firmly, warning her with his eyes.

After a brief standoff, he whispered, “When I say I won’t touch you, I mean it. My word is my bond.”

She hesitated, aware of his pride. He added, “I have something to say to you.”

Still, she wasn’t interested. “Just sleep. Don’t do anything else. No talking.”

His eyes flickered with something unreadable. Eventually, he nodded and released her wrist. “Okay.”

Rebecca opened the door, reassuring Josette, “It’s okay, Grandma. I’ll sleep here.”

Josette gave her a knowing look, as if asking, “Is everything really fine?”

Rebecca nodded. “Yes, you can go back to sleep.”

“Grandma, I want pasta for breakfast tomorrow,” Vance called out, getting up from the floor.

“Alright,” Josette chuckled, patting Rebecca’s hand.

Rebecca closed the door, ready to sleep. Vance lay down without a word, but the silence didn’t last five minutes.

“Rebecca...”

“I’m trying to sleep. Don’t disturb me.”

Her tone mirrored how he used to dismiss her when she was clinging to him for conversation.

“I have work to do.”

“I have a meeting tomorrow. You should rest.”

“Go if you want. I have things to take care of.”

For five years, she had been rejected countless times with various excuses. Later, he stopped making excuses altogether and simply brushed her off.

How ironic! Had the tides truly turned? Was he so eager to talk to her now?

Before, the only person who could bring him down to this level was Catherine. She had reported the incident, wondering if Catherine had been found yet and if Vance had come here to plead for Catherine.

With those thoughts, she closed her eyes. Finally, the world slipped into the silence of night.

When she woke up the next morning, Vance was no longer beside her.

Josette had made pasta, the aroma filling the air. Stepping out, Rebecca noticed an empty plate on the table.

Clearly, Vance had already eaten, but his belongings were still around, indicating that he hadn't left yet.

Josette started to cook more for her, and Rebecca stepped outside for fresh air.

Vance's voice faintly came from the garden. He was on the phone, keeping his voice low, but she caught the name-Cathy.

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Rebecca opened the door wider, listening to Vance talking on the phone.

"Cathy, trust me. I asked the doctor. He's a student of that renowned doctor from Arelmoor. You can try again. Just go to him by yourself, okay?" he whispered. "DINK? Fine, but I know you don't want that. You're just afraid of failing again. Don't be disheartened. Other people's children are theirs. Don't you want to have your own child? Don't be stubborn. I'll come pick you up."

Rebecca leaned against the door, her heart sinking. No wonder he suddenly wanted to have a baby. That was because Catherine couldn't have any. So, he wanted Rebecca to bear one for him and gave it to Catherine.

He was delusional. Rejecting him last night proved to be the right choice.

She closed the door softly and went back inside to eat.

When he walked in, she was slurping her pasta as if nothing had happened. He came over, glancing at her plain plate. "Want an egg? I'll fry one. What about milk?"

She paused. "I never drink milk, and Josette already made me a poached egg. Thanks anyway."

"Then..."

"Just let me eat my breakfast in peace."

She kept her voice low so that Josette couldn't hear it, but her tone was resolute.

The reversal was almost funny. She had once hovered over him exactly like this.

"Vance, do you want an egg?"

"Vance, should I warm some milk for you?"

"Vance, do you want shrimp? I can peel it for you."

"Vance, would you like soup? I'll get you some."

He would respond without looking up or with a frown, "I'm thinking about work. Can I eat in peace?"

Truly, when one had no desires, they became strong. When she desired love from him, she stood in an unequal position, looking up to him, cherishing him, and making herself smaller.

Once she detached herself from wanting anything, she naturally straightened her posture. Now he was having desires, so he came to her with sweet words.

Too bad-what he desired was something she despised. No way she'd fulfill his wishes.

He lowered his gaze, lost in thought. Then he asked, "Is Dr. Jefferson coming over today?"

"He should be."

"Well, I'll head out then. The company needs me."

The company? But he was supposed to pick up Catherine.

But instead of laying it bare, she nodded calmly. "Alright, go ahead."

Whether he went to the office or to Catherine no longer mattered, He hesitated, but in the end, he just stood up to say goodbye to Josette before heading out.

Not long after, Rebecca's phone vibrated. Messages and emails arrived almost simultaneously-alerts of her ticket information. Her flight with the dance troupe had been booked.

She glanced at the date, so happy that even the air felt fresher. Now only 14 days were left before she went far away.

While the sun was still mild, she helped Josette water the flowers.

"Grandma, how about I set up an automatic watering system for you?" she suggested. "It can be timed, so when you stay at the villa, you don't have to worry about the plants. They'll water themselves."

Josette's eyes widened. "There's such a clever thing?"

Chapter III