

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 111

“Yeah, I’ve only ever seen them online. I’ll buy a set, and we can test it together,” Rebecca said, excitement bubbling in her voice. “And once it’s set up, I can take you traveling whenever we want. No. more worrying about the flowers drying out or bothering the neighbors to water them.”

“But...” Josette hesitated. “Aren’t you supposed to be going abroad? That villa...”

“No matter what happens, you’re coming with me,” Rebecca said firmly.

Once she found her footing, she would come back to fetch her grandmother.

Josette’s eyes softened. She reached out and stroked Rebecca’s hair.

Rebecca hadn’t been a healthy child. As a girl, she’d received little attention from her parents, who poured everything into Emmett.

Whenever she was sick, it was always Josette taking care of her. She had grown up cradled in Josette’s palms, but she knew that Josette’s own marriage hadn’t been happy either.

Josette’s husband, Renzo Perry, had treated her poorly and favored their son, Soren. Their daughter, Kaitlyn Perry, had benefited from Josette’s relentless efforts to support her education.

If not for Josette’s sacrifices, Kaitlyn would have become just another blood pack for the family. Though Rebecca didn’t know much about Kaitlyn’s life overseas, she knew that Kaitlyn often sent money back home.

Kaitlyn always offered to bring Josette to live with her. Josette refused every time, not because of Renzo. Even after he passed away, she still wouldn’t go.

Rebecca knew that Josette couldn’t bear to leave her behind, worried about her well-being and happiness. So, Josette stayed, determined to be the safe harbor she could always run back to.

It was a rare, peaceful afternoon. After they finished watering the flowers, they enjoyed tea in the shade and chatted casually.

Then Rebecca’s phone buzzed with a message from Edwin. His schedule had changed; he couldn’t come to the house that afternoon, but he was seeing patients at the clinic all morning. If she could make it, she should come in.

Rebecca quickly gathered her things and declined Josette's offer to accompany her, given how long the journey would take. And there would be waiting in line. It would be too much for Josette; better to let her stay at home.

Taxis were easy to find, even in the suburbs. Josette walked her to the curb, made sure the driver knew the exact destination, and waved goodbye.

Arriving at the clinic, Rebecca followed the nurse's instructions to take a number and wait.

This place opened recently. Without the recommendation from the doctor in Arelmoor, she never would

Chapter II have known it existed.

In a short time, it had built a quiet reputation. Many patients came seeking treatment. The waiting room was packed, with not a single seat empty.

The clinic treated everyone the same. Rich or poor, everyone waited for their turn in the same chairs.

The nurse guided her to a seat. "Please sit here. Dr. Jefferson's office is over there. Someone will call you when it's your turn."

"Thank you." Rebecca nodded, familiar with the routine by now.

The clinic had several doctors, each with different specialties.

She pulled out her phone to read, but a familiar voice made her look up. Through the gaps between the rows of patients, she spotted Vance walking out of the gynecology and obstetrics suite-with Catherine beside him.

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Vance had brought Catherine to see the doctor after all. Maybe he would finally stop pressuring Rebecca to have a baby.

The nurse led them to the pharmacy counter and asked whether they wanted the prescription compounded there or sent home as a standard prescription.

Vance chose the compounded version-either pickup or delivery. He selected delivery and wrote down his company address.

Rebecca couldn't see the details from where she sat, but she heard Catherine ask in a sweet, playful voice, "Why the company address?"

Vance set down his pen, adopting a serious tone. "Deliver it to the office. I'm leaving my private number so they can call me when it arrives. I'll sign for it myself and make sure you take it. Or you'll skip doses the second I'm not watching."

Catherine pouted and gave a little wiggle, pretending to be annoyed. What a devoted CEO-personally signing for medicine deliveries!

Rebecca remembered a time years ago when the weather had turned cold overnight. Worried Vance didn't have warm clothes in the office, she'd planned to send some but was afraid to go by herself.

Nancy was busy that day, so she thought about hiring a courier. Even then, she'd called him first, asking whether to leave his number with the driver or have the package dropped at the front desk.

Before she could finish her words, he had cut her off coldly. "Give my private number to a random courier? What are you thinking?"

She had understood then that a successful CEO like him valued privacy. His number wasn't for just anyone.

Yet here he was, freely writing down that same private number and insisting on signing for the delivery himself. So, someone who professed certain principles often had none, as those principles were merely dictated by personal preference.

As if that wasn't enough, he asked about dietary restrictions. The nurse told him to check with the doctor.

"Wait here. I'll go find out," he told Catherine, walking away.

The nurse gave her an extra pack. "This is for external use. Massage the ointment into your abdomen for a few minutes, then apply this warm pack."

Catherine frowned. "Massage? How can I do that myself?"

Rebecca overheard it, thinking it was perfect. Vance was a skilled masseur.

“You can do it yourself,” the nurse replied, “or ask your husband to help.”

“Oh...” Catherine took the pack.

Vance returned just then. “What’s wrong?”

The nurse repeated the instructions about the medicine pack.

“Got it.” He took the pack from Catherine’s hands. “Let’s go. The doctor gave a long list of things to avoid -no cold or raw foods, and keep sweets to a minimum.”

“What? No way! I can’t survive a day without bubble tea and cake!” Catherine protested as they walked out.

“Try to cut back, not eliminate. You need to control yourself,” he said firmly, shaking the medicine pack in his hand. “This is once a day, right? Before bed?”

“Yeah.”

“Alright, let’s go.”

As they left, Rebecca pictured the same hands that had massaged her legs last night now going to rub Catherine’s abdomen. The thought made her stomach churn.

Just then, her phone rang with a call from Vance.

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Rebecca answered the call, and Vance’s voice exploded through the speaker. “You reported the case? Why would you do that?”

It meant the police had contacted them.

Before she could reply, a nurse came to notify her. “Ma’am, it’s your turn.”

She ended the call and smiled. “Thank you.”

Almost immediately, her phone rang again. She ignored it and walked into the consultation room. Throughout the session, her phone vibrated persistently in her bag.

“Are you going to answer that?” Edwin asked.

She shook her head. “No need. Probably just spam.”

After a while, the ringing finally stopped.

When the session ended, Edwin asked, “Have you seen the gynecologist yet?”

Rebecca understood at once. Vance must have asked him about gynecology, and Edwin assumed it was for her, oblivious to the truth.

“No, I’m good,” she replied, feeling no need to expose her scars to the whole world.

Edwin nodded. “Actually, there’s no rush. You’re still young.”

“Yeah. When should I come tomorrow?” she said, having rescheduled her visa application. “Would the afternoon work?”

“Yes. I’ll be here all day,” he confirmed.

Perfect. She could do the interview, enjoy a nice lunch, and come straight for treatment.

“I have a set of rehabilitation exercises for you,” he added. “Based on your progress, I think you’re ready to try them. They’re developed by my mentor and are still being tested. You’d be helping us refine the protocol. In other words, you’d be a test subject.”

“I’m happy to,” she said sincerely, willing to try anything.

Even if her leg never fully healed, she wouldn’t despair. Becoming part of medical research would still be worthwhile.

“Great.” He nodded. “I’ll send you the video later. For now, the nurse will take you to the rehab room so you can try the movements.”

“Okay.” Rebecca grabbed her bag and followed the nurse out, never once checking her phone.

The exercises were brutal. Every muscle protested, but her dancer’s body still remembered its flexibility.

She managed to finish the entire sequence.

The nurse was surprised, noting that she was the first patient to finish the entire set on the first try. Rebecca's custom clothes for rehabilitation were soaked with sweat, a sign of how difficult it was.

"Way to go. Need help changing?" the nurse offered.

Rebecca felt like she was submerged in water. Her legs were jelly, her energy drained. She shook her head, deciding to rest for a while.

"Alright, take a break. Ring the bell if you need anything," the nurse said before moving on to other tasks.

Rebecca breathed heavily, moving to sit on a bench nearby. But her strength betrayed her, bringing her back down to the floor. She attempted to stand, but her legs were too weak. She then tried pushing herself up using the chair, but her arms trembled and refused to cooperate.

Finally, she sighed with resignation, closed her eyes, and relaxed her body, waiting for her strength to recover.

Suddenly, someone burst in, fiery and agitated. "Why didn't you answer your phone?"

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Rebecca's bag was kept in a locker. She didn't even know if he had called her afterward. But even if she had known, she wouldn't have answered.

Now Vance looked rattled. She had known him since she was fifteen, and there was only one person who could ever make him lose his composure like this.

When his family threw money in his face and he cut them off, he had been ice-cold and calm. When his grandmother passed away, the grief had carved him hollow, yet he had simply told her, "My grandma is gone."

Only Catherine could unravel him. Five years ago, when she left the country, he had been a wreck, drinking himself numb every night.

Now the police were looking for her, and the same destructive fury was back.

On the floor, Rebecca quietly watched him approach. In one swift motion, he grabbed her arms, hauled her up, and dropped her onto the bench.

Her back slammed against the hard backrest. Pain shot through her spine. She bit her lip and swallowed the gasp.

“Why the hell didn’t you answer?” he shouted. “The police are investigating the fire. Did you know that?” She stared straight ahead at the limited-edition belt she had once chosen for him. It matched every pair of pants he owned. Her voice was quiet and steady. “I reported it. Of course, I knew.”

His finger shook as he pointed at her. “Cathy already apologized. We’re willing to pay whatever you want. Why did you report it?”

“We?” Rebecca laughed bitterly. “Who exactly?”

He paused, then quickly regained his confidence. “Cathy and I.”

She laughed harder, the sound tipping into something raw and painful. Tears gathered at the corners of her eyes.

“Have you laughed enough?” he snapped.

“Not even close,” she said defiantly. “I’m laughing at myself for not seeing the truth. You’re right. You two are a team, and I’m the outsider. So, when the wife nearly burns to death, it’s still her fault, isn’t it?”

She paused, continuing, “It’s always my fault. I shouldn’t have saved you. Shouldn’t have said yes when you proposed. Shouldn’t have still been living in your house when Catherine came back. And when the fire started, I definitely shouldn’t have survived. I should have died in that conference room so the two of you could finally be together, right?”

Vance stood frozen, speechless.

“But I already for you I’d step aside,” she said, her voice rising. “Divorce me. Marry her. Be a real couple in public. Why won’t you do it? Or do you need me to die to set you free?”

Under the bright rehab-room lights, something raw flickered in his eyes. He stouched in front of her. “That’s not what I meant. You have to believe me. No one in this world wants less to her well more than do”

She said nothing. The pain in her chest was almost unbearable.

Of course he wanted her to be well. Only then could his conscience be clear. Only then would he be truly free if she had emerged unscathed from that car accident, this marriage never would have happened.

make do understand was that he was also the one who had hurt her the most.

Her eyes somes with unshed tears, and she turned her face away. "Define well. Am I supposed to die in wer conference room? Or in the drain at homes noplér #15

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"Rebecca!" Vance interrupted her, pain twisting his features. "Can't you just stop? It was just a prank, meant to scare you. Cathy is the kind of person who won't step on an ant crossing the sidewalk. She could never want to kill you."

Rebecca had no energy left for this conversation. Convincing someone who refused to see the truth was one of the hardest things in the world.

"Vance," she said wearily, "I know nothing I say will change your mind, just like nothing you say will change mine. So, stop wasting your time here. Go talk to the police."

"Rebecca!" His brows drew together. "What will it take for you to drop the report? Tell me."

She met his eyes. "I won't drop it. Ever."

"Fine!" he sighed deeply, full of disappointment. "Fine. I see what kind of person you really are now. I never imagined jealousy could turn someone so terrifying."

"Terrifying?" She almost laughed in disbelief.

Blinded by anger, he could no longer tell right from wrong. It was ridiculous.

"Who exactly is terrifying? You must be talking about Catherine," she said.

No matter how she turned it over, she could not understand how the fire had somehow become her fault.

"Alright," he said coldly. "Hold onto the title of Mrs. Bradford until the day you die, but I will do whatever it takes to protect her."

She was speechless. Did he honestly think she still wanted an empty title? All she wanted was freedom.

Before she could retort, he stormed out.

Sitting back down in her chair, she felt oddly invigorated by their argument, as if it had restored some of her energy.

Just as she was about to change her clothes and head home, Vance barged back in. “What are you still doing here? Go home!”

She leaned back, perfectly calm. “What am I doing? I still have to see the gynecologist.”

His expression darkened. “What gynecologist?”

“You asked Dr. Jefferson about gynecology,” she sneered. “So, he recommended one expert, telling me to go after my session.”

He paused, and she pressed on. “What? Wasn’t it for me? Then who in your household needs to see a gynecologist?”

His expression turned thunderous, but she was relentless. “I heard they prescribed massages and medical packs. I’ll take the medicine home, but there’s no one there to massage me. How can I do that myself?”

He finally caught on. “What exactly are you trying to say?”

“Oh, and can I have my prescription delivered to your office?” she scoffed. “You already gave them the address and your private number. Don’t worry. I’ll take it on time. You won’t have to watch over me.”

He lost his composure. “So, you saw us and overheard our conversation?”

Her smirk didn’t falter.

“Did you spy on me? Are you this calculating?” His tone shifted from confusion to accusation, ending with a mocking laugh. “Surely, Cathy can’t compete with you.”

She found it laughable. Was she really the calculating one?

“If you want to call me calculating, fine,” she said. “But it’s only for your sake. You already have someone at your side. If I step out in public, what would people think of you?”

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“What are you getting at?” Vance stepped closer. “Cathy suffered domestic violence because of her fertility problems. It’s become a deep trauma for her. As her friend, I heard about a good doctor and brought her here. What’s wrong with that? You’re jealous over this?”

Rebecca maintained her smile. “No, I’m not jealous. You’ve misunderstood. Whether you want to watch her take her medicine or give her massages, that’s your choice. I won’t interfere. But I have rights too. So please, after you’ve massaged her, keep your hands off me. It disgusts me.”

“What did you say?” His anger flared. “Say it again!”

She lifted her chin and granted his wish. “I said it disgusts me.”

“You... are utterly unreasonable!” He shook with rage. “Let me make this clear: if you think you can use this to get her arrested or fired, you’re wrong. I will not allow it. Don’t pick a fight you can’t win.”

His phone rang, and the screen lit up with the caller ID: Cathy Babe.

“Hello?” His tone shifted instantly from frustration to gentleness. “Cathy...”

“Vance...” Catherine’s voice trembled on the other end. “Where are you? I’m scared.”

“Don’t be afraid. I’m coming right now.” He backed toward the door, his eyes locked on Rebecca. “I told you I’d hire the best lawyers. Nothing is going to happen to you. I’m on my way.”

In the doorway, he shot her one last furious look, then turned and strode out. In the chair, she watched him leave with a bitter smile.

That afternoon, she had endured pain so intense it felt as if her bones were being broken and reset, yet he hadn’t asked once how she was. She had been on the floor, drenched in sweat, and he hadn’t asked what happened or why she was there.

But at a single call from Catherine, he rushed off without a second thought.

Once, she had been terrified, too. He just had never known or cared. Now she wasn’t afraid of anything anymore.

Half an hour later, her strength recovered. She changed her clothes and took a taxi back to Syliaview.

By the time she arrived, it was already dark. The aroma of Josette's cooking wafted through the yard, prompting her to inhale deeply.

These days, the only things that could still bring tears to her eyes were the future waiting for her and her grandmother's love.

Vance didn't come back. He was probably at Catherine's place, giving her a massage.

Rebecca felt nothing but relief. It gave her one more precious evening with Josette.

She had dinner and a refreshing shower. Then Josette offered to massage her legs, and she agreed readily, fully embracing the moment.

As Josette's warm hands worked the sore muscles, her phone rang with a video call.

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It was a call from Kaitlyn Perry.

Rebecca had seen her aunt only a handful of times before. Since she was old enough to remember, Kaitlyn had been little more than a name in the family.

Renzo had always complained that sending Kaitlyn away was like throwing money down a hole. He would ramble on about how other families' daughters married well and helped their siblings.

Rebecca's parents had echoed the same resentment: Kaitlyn lived a good life abroad and never helped the family. And their so-called support was primarily meant to help Soren.

But Rebecca knew the truth. Kaitlyn had come back for Soren's wedding and for Renzo's funeral, and she had given money both times.

It was also Kaitlyn who had funded Soren and Adeline's wedding. Rebecca had learned that from her grandparents' arguments when she was older.

Renzo had cursed Kaitlyn for being ungrateful. Josette had fought back, reminding him that Kaitlyn sent money every month and had given a huge sum for Soren's wedding.

“It’s only right,” Renzo had retorted. “What kind of daughter doesn’t help her family? In the old days, they traded daughters for marriage. And she stopped sending money after that anyway.”

Later, Rebecca had heard Josette on the phone, begging Kaitlyn to stop sending money and focus on her own life.

When Renzo passed away, Kaitlyn returned. But instead of a tearful reunion, it had been chaotic. Soren refused to pay for the funeral and demanded that Kaitlyn cover it, even though he had already taken all of Renzo’s savings.

Josette sided with Kaitlyn, demanding fairness, but Soren was obstinate. In the end, Kaitlyn paid everything to avoid a scandal.

After that, Josette gave up on Soren completely.

Kaitlyn suggested taking her away, but Josette refused, reluctant to leave Rebecca behind. She only asked Kaitlyn not to come back or worry about the family anymore.

After Renzo’s death, however, life had become easier for Josette. No more daily insults and unreasonable demands. Soren inherited Renzo’s grumpy temperament of yelling and throwing things, but at least he lived elsewhere.

The last time Rebecca had seen Kaitlyn was during college. Kaitlyn had come home for work, visited her at school, and brought gifts, cash, and beautiful clothes.

When Rebecca injured her leg, Kaitlyn video-called, encouraged her, and sent money. When Rebecca got married, Kaitlyn sent gifts again.

The bonds between people were truly fascinating. Despite the distance and the years, Rebecca had always felt a special warmth toward Kaitlyn.

When the video call connected, Rebecca felt happy and relieved to see Kaitlyn in good shape.

“Rebecca, you’re there too!” Kaitlyn smiled at her through the screen.

“Hi, Aunt Kaitlyn. How have you been?” Rebecca returned the smile.

“Good,” Kaitlyn replied. “And how are you and Josette?”

After exchanging pleasantries, Kaitlyn continued, “Mom, the reason I called is to tell you I’ve moved. I’m in France now, and everything is going well. You don’t need to worry about me. My job is going smoothly, and I’m all settled in. You and Josette should come visit. I’d love to show you around.”

Josette's eyes lit up. "Rebecca is going to study abroad!"

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"Really?" Kaitlyn's face brightened instantly. "When? I'll help with everything."

"It's still early. I think it'll be in August," Rebecca replied.

"With me here, you won't have to worry about a thing," Kaitlyn beamed. "Don't even stress about the expenses; I'll cover them. This is wonderful, Rebecca. I've been alone out here for so many years. Finally, I'll have family with me."

They talked for a long time, reluctant to hang up.

Josette's eyes glistened with tears. "Kaitlyn has had a tough time."

Rebecca could understand her feelings. Soren had always complained that Josette wasted money on Kaitlyn's education while he couldn't even get into college.

But the truth was, Kaitlyn had earned her place overseas through sheer hard work. She had aced the entrance exams, secured a full scholarship, and worked part-time to support herself.

Josette was only a primary-school teacher, and Soren had squandered whatever money came in. There was no way they could have paid for overseas study.

Josette had wanted to help Soren succeed, but he had failed the college entrance exam. He simply had no right to complain.

"Wait here," Josette said, turning to enter her room. When she returned, she held out a card with tears in her eyes. "Here. This card has some money on it. Use it when you're out there, and take good care of yourself. I couldn't help Kaitlyn much, and she suffered a lot."

"I have money," Rebecca declined. "Plenty."

Over the past five years, while she might not have gained much else, she certainly had enough money. Vance had been generous with cash and had put several properties in her name. She had saved more than enough.

A sudden idea struck her. “Grandma, why don’t you come with me?”

Josette paused, then waved her hands. “No, no, that won’t work.”

But once the thought took root, Rebecca couldn’t let it go. Now that she knew Kaitlyn was in France, the three of them could live together.

“You could get a tourist or family-visit visa and come with me,” she pleaded, wrapping her arms around Josette. “It’s my first time going so far, and my leg isn’t great. You’d worry if I went alone, wouldn’t you?”

Josette hesitated, uncertainty creeping onto her face.

Rebecca suggested, “I’ll talk to Kaitlyn tomorrow, and we’ll follow her advice, okay?”

She understood Josette was worried about burdening Kaitlyn. Though Kaitlyn had never complained, life abroad couldn’t have been easy.

Now Rebecca could shoulder the responsibility and cover Josette’s expenses. Kaitlyn wouldn’t need to worry about a thing. It would simply mean the family was finally reunited.

The thought of them reuniting in a foreign land filled her with happiness. She went to bed early, excited for the visa interview the next day.

Before sleeping, she looked up the requirements for a family-visit or tourist visa. Once she had a general understanding, she scrolled through her social media and stumbled upon a post by Vance.

The photo showed two clasped hands. The woman’s hand was adorned with a large diamond ring, and her wrist with a luxury watch. The man wore a simple silver ring.

The caption read: [I work my whole life just to give you a clear sky. Don’t be afraid. I’m here.]

A high school classmate commented: [Rebecca and you are so sweet! Truly enviable!]

Another commented: [Who would have seen this? You guys were so discreet back then.]

Everyone knew the campus heartthrob had married the quiet dancer, but no one knew the woman he truly loved wasn’t her.

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Aiden commented: [Vance, you're a real man!]

Rebecca couldn't help but sneer. Was this what a real man looked like? Hurting his wife and protecting his lover?

She hadn't planned to comment, but Aiden's words made her eyes sting. Before she could stop herself, she typed: [Mr. Bradford, whose hand are you holding?]

Right after, her phone chimed. A screenshot popped up along with a message from a high school classmate.

Jenny Moore: [Rebecca, you haven't blocked me after all!]

Rebecca didn't understand the jab, but the screenshot was Vance's post-only the high school classmates' comments were visible. Jenny didn't know Aiden, and Rebecca's comment hadn't been there when the screenshot was taken.

Rebecca: [Why would I block you?]

Jenny: [You vanished five years ago. Ever since you got married, you have never come to a single reunion, never participated in any group chats, and never talked to any of us.]

Rebecca was stunned. It was true she had kept to herself, but Jenny's words hit like a slap, waking her up to a harsher reality. She had been trapped in such a small circle, whether it was due to her marriage or her choices.

Jenny: [And Vance hides you so well. At every reunion, he says you hate socializing. If we didn't know him, we'd think he locked you up.]

A chill settled in Rebecca's chest. So, he had been meeting their old classmates all these years and never once mentioned it to her.

Now she found it hard to explain the whole thing to Jenny. While she might not enjoy socializing, that wasn't the reason she had skipped reunions.

The truth was that Vance didn't want to acknowledge her as his wife in front of them. If it had been

Catherine, he would have proudly shown her off.

He took Catherine to every business dinner, whether with Pascal Lemke or Sean Mueller. The posts that announced his life to the world were also about Catherine.

She had never once appeared in any of Vance's social media. He hadn't even posted anything about their wedding.

Jenny: [We're all scattered now, busy with our lives. Next time there's a reunion, make sure Vance brings you along. What is he hiding? Afraid someone will steal you away?]

Rebecca smiled bitterly, replying: [Okay.]

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Jenny: [He just deleted his post. What game is he playing?]

Rebecca checked it out, and the post was indeed gone. Clearly, it was because of her comment.

Jenny: [Do you and Vance have a baby yet? I can't imagine how gorgeous your kids would be.]

Each word pierced Rebecca's heart, stirring memories she had been desperately trying to bury.

It wasn't Jenny's fault, though. No normal person would expect a husband to post about a woman other than his wife.

Rebecca: [No, we don't have a baby.]

She had fantasized about it once, imagining what their child would look like. She had even used an application to blend their faces and sent the picture to Vance.

It was foolish, and he replied: [I'm in a meeting. Don't distract me.]

She had believed him and felt guilty. Then she went to close the curtains, only to see him standing in the garden below, staring into space.

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Vance just didn't want to go home until the clock struck the right hour. And he definitely didn't want to talk about children.

Rebecca: [What about you? What have you been busy with lately?]

She changed the subject, unwilling to talk about her life with Vance anymore.

Jenny: [Me? Working like a dog every day. I'm currently at a construction company, drawing blueprints and visiting sites. I'm actually out of town on a business trip right now, but I'll find time to hang out when I'm back.]

Rebecca: [Sounds good.]

Jenny: [All right, I'll let you go. Wouldn't want to interrupt your romantic evening with Mr. Bradford, ha-ha.]

Rebecca: [Goodnight, Jenny.]

Jenny sent back a goodnight emoji.

Chatting with Jenny sparked her interest in her circle of friends. For five years, she had sunk into extreme self-doubt, severed all ties with the outside world, and even disconnected from everyone online.

She opened her feed, scrolled through her old classmates' posts, and delved into their vibrant lives. Everyone had their own share of joys and sorrows. Life wasn't always peaceful, but they were striving hard to move forward.

She was left behind, but that was okay. She was catching up now.

She stumbled upon a post from Vivian, who was pulling an all-nighter with her boyfriend at work. The photos and captions indicated the guy was in tech. They were both young, vigorous, and full of hope.

She then tapped on Vance's profile, purely out of curiosity. Sure enough, the post was gone.

He hadn't set any visibility restrictions like "three days visible" or "six months visible", yet his homepage was clean, like he hadn't posted any updates. So, a man who rarely posted anything on social media before had broken his own rule that night.

Rebecca put her phone down, turned off the lights, and fell into a peaceful sleep.

The next morning, she woke up early, freshened up, and got dressed. After double-checking the required documents, she said goodbye to Josette and took a taxi to the visa center.

She sailed through security, waited for her turn, and completed the interview without a hitch. The officer congratulated her with a smile, and the last knot of tension in her chest finally loosened.

As she turned to leave, the officer added, “You did great. I hope you have a wonderful time studying abroad.”

Her heart leaped with joy. “Thank you!”

She had paid for expedited processing, so the passport should arrive within five business days. She would be able to travel with Lauren’s troupe without delay.

Now only 13 days were left. Every morning, she woke up counting down, feeling like a butterfly whose wings had finally dried and were ready to lift her into the sky.

When she left the visa center, it was still early. She found a quiet café, ordered a latte, and relaxed a little. After grabbing a quick bite, she headed to the clinic for the therapy sessions and rehabilitation.

The rehab session from yesterday was intense, causing every part of her body to ache. Today, she had to endure it all over again, and the programs were even harder.

In no time, sweat began to bead on her forehead. Five minutes in, and she was completely soaked.

“Let me know if it’s too much,” the nurse said. “Don’t push yourself.”

She trembled, clenching her teeth. “I’m okay. I can keep going.”

The words were barely out when her legs buckled. She hit the floor.

“Are you all right?” The nurse rushed over to help, but another figure shoved past her.

Vance scooped Rebecca into his arms, his eyes wide with alarm. “What are you doing to yourself?”