

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 131

“No!” Catherine broke down, throwing herself in front of Vance. “You didn’t do anything. How can you take full responsibility? This is all my fault.”

Turning to the officer, she said, “Sir, it wasn’t him. He didn’t know anything. It was me. The recordings are my words. I couldn’t stand the way she treated Vance and all of us, so I decided to play a prank on her. When she showed up at the company, I told the receptionist to keep her from going upstairs. When she threatened to call the police, I sent Kimberly down to meet her, locked her in the conference room, and gave her lemonade mixed with mango juice. I only wanted to embarrass her.”

Aiden pushed his way forward. “It was my idea. I told Kimberly to take her to the conference room. I’m the one who cut the wires and the line to the sprinkler system. I just wanted to scare her. Cathy doesn’t know anything about electrical work.”

Lucas pushed in right behind him. “It was me. I ordered security not to answer her calls for help. We did all of it. Bribing those three to lie was also my idea. Vance had no clue.”

“Vance...” Catherine looked up at him with tearful eyes. “I’m sorry for dragging you into this. Please don’t take the blame for us. You’re the most important one among us. The company can’t run without you, and...”

She glanced at Rebecca. “And she can’t do without you. Don’t do anything rash.”

Aiden and Lucas turned on Rebecca with pure loathing. Lucas lamented, “Did you hear that, Rebecca? Even now, she’s still thinking of you. If you had even half her kindness and generosity, none of this would have happened.”

Aiden pulled him back. “That’s enough. What’s the point of talking to a poisonous snake like her? She’ll never understand us. Vance, do you see what real brotherhood looks like? What does family mean? This is it. And this scheming woman? You built an empire for her and suffered for her, and this is how she repays you.”

Rebecca arched an eyebrow, tired of hearing the same rhetoric over and over again. They called themselves Vance’s true friends and her the evil woman who had ruined his life.

If this counted as evil, then they hadn’t even scratched the surface.

She handed her phone to the officer. “Here’s the evidence. I’ve said everything I needed to say. As they pointed out, I will not withdraw the complaint. If there’s nothing else, may I leave? I’ll come back anytime you need me.”

The officer asked her to sign a form. Then she gathered her things and dragged her feet out of the station.

The rehab session that afternoon had drained every last ounce of her strength, and the soreness from yesterday's training made each step unsteady. After the long confrontation, even her mind was exhausted.

Outside, the sun was blinding. She swayed, the world tilting, and the thought crossed her mind that fighting these people was pure poison-body and soul.

Then everything went black, and she crumpled to the ground.

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"Are you okay, ma'am?"

Rebecca heard the voice behind her and felt hands catching her. Vaguely, she realized it was the female police officer from earlier.

But before she could respond, the world slipped away, and she fainted in the officer's arms. It was a long, heavy sleep, the kind that comes after total depletion.

When she woke up, the room felt familiar. She blinked, realizing she was not at Josette's but back in the master bedroom she shared with Vance, tucked under the covers.

Her throat felt scratchy, and she coughed.

"Madam!" Nancy appeared at the door. "You're awake? Would you like some water? I'll get you some."

"Come in," Rebecca rasped.

Nancy entered, holding a glass of water. She helped Rebecca sit up and held the glass to her lips.

"How did I end up here?" Rebecca remembered the showdown at the station and the collapse outside.

“Mr. Bradford brought you back,” Nancy explained. “He said you weren’t feeling well, and he called the family doctor, who said you were just exhausted and needed rest. He told me to let you sleep and left for some business.”

Rebecca nodded, acknowledging her fatigue. It wasn’t just physical but mental too.

“And your grandmother called earlier,” Nancy added. “Mr. Bradford answered and didn’t mention you were unwell. He just said you were tired and staying home to rest instead of going over.”

Rebecca nodded. “Can you bring me my phone?”

Nancy retrieved her bag. Fortunately, it appeared untouched, likely because Vance had been preoccupied with that case and hadn’t had time to rummage through it.

She took out her phone and called Josette.

“You’re awake, dear? I called you but couldn’t get through. I was worried your appointment didn’t go well,” Josette said with concern.

“Sorry, I left my phone in the locker during rehab,” Rebecca explained.

“I understand,” Josette replied gently. “I called Vance, and he said you were too tired and had fallen asleep at home. He even video-called me to show you sleeping.”

Rebecca smiled bitterly. Of course, he had, hiding the ugly parts so Josette wouldn’t worry. For once, his lies served her purpose.

They chatted a little longer. Josette told her to rest, and they hung up.

Rebecca then noticed a new message from Vivian. It was just a question mark, and she replied with a simple “OK”. That was enough for them to understand each other.

She believed she had won this round, but the victory tasted like ash. The whole ordeal had shown her how small her power was and how thoroughly she had walled herself off for five years.

When Vance said he would spare no expense, he meant throwing every dollar and connection at the problem. With her bad leg and five years of near-total isolation, she had no network and no allies- nothing to go against him.

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Earlier, Rebecca had come across a post about Vivian and her boyfriend, Wade Nolan.

The two young people were grinding late nights for their future, full of fire and hope. She and Vance had never shared anything like that.

By coincidence, Wade worked in IT. So, she reached out to Vivian, asking whether Wade would be willing to do her a favor and get a generous reward.

Vivian had agreed instantly, not for the money, but because she still remembered the ugly scene at the luxury store when Vance and Catherine had shown up together.

Rebecca had been torn about it. The task was risky, and she didn't have anyone else to turn to. But like Vance to his friends, she promised she would move heaven and earth to protect Wade if anything went wrong.

She had also given him a foolproof way to stay legally clean, and he assured her they would communicate through secure channels, including sending her the surveillance files.

She wasn't afraid of losing the battle. Catherine's situation was far worse. The evidence was ironclad, and Vance wouldn't gamble on it.

Her body still ached fiercely, so when Nancy called her for dinner, she didn't want to move.

"Just bring it in," she said.

She hadn't eaten in bed since the earliest days after her injury. She had always treasured the house too much to allow any mess. But that reverence was gone now.

After a full day out and the brutal rehab, she was soaked in sweat. Vance had simply dumped her on the bed when he brought her home; the sheets were already ruined and would need to change anyway.

Nancy carried in a tray. Rebecca had no appetite but forced down every bite. She needed strength for rehab and the life ahead. She was too weak right now.

Nancy cleared away the plates and asked if she wanted a bath. Rebecca nodded, unwilling to stand the sticky feeling for another minute.

"Please run the water for me and change the bedding," she requested.

"Sure." Nancy headed to the bathroom.

Rebecca attempted to get out of bed and walk on her own, but after just a few steps, her legs buckled and started trembling. The muscle fatigue was brutal, far worse than ordinary soreness.

Nancy gasped, rushing over. “Madam! Let me help you.”

Rebecca took a deep breath, feeling no embarrassment, since Nancy had bathed her many times in the early days when she could barely move.

Nancy guided her into the bathroom and helped her ease into the tub.

“Alright, you can go change the bedding,” she said. “I’ll call you when I’m done.”

She leaned back against the tub. The warm water soaked into every sore muscle, easing the pain and bringing a sense of comfort. She closed her eyes to relax and nearly drifted off to sleep.

When it was time to get out, she lazily called out, “Nancy, I’m done.”

She heard footsteps approach and stop at the edge of the tub, but Nancy didn’t speak.

“Nancy?” Her eyes snapped open, only to see Vance standing there.

“What are you doing here?” She instinctively crossed her arms over her chest, then realized the bubbles still covered her and relaxed a fraction. “Get out! Nancy?”

“She won’t come in,” he said, staring down at her.

“Nancy?” she shouted again.

“She gets her pay from me. Who do you think she will listen to?” He bent down, his face suddenly near enough that she could see the red veins in his eyes and her own reflection in his pupils.

“What do you want?” She tightened her grip on the tub’s edge, bracing herself.

He plunged his hands into the bubbles, firmly grasping her shoulders and effortlessly lifting her from the tub. The sudden rush of cool air hit her bare skin. For the first time, she stood completely naked in front of him.

Shame and panic crashed over her. She struggled, but it was useless. The slippery bubbles on her feet and the slick tub made her slide helplessly.

And with her legs lacking strength, his grip on her shoulders meant that any movement sent her sliding around. If he hadn’t been holding her, she would have fallen.

“Keep fighting, and you’ll hurt yourself,” he warned in a low voice.

She went still, ceasing her struggle, because she couldn't afford to fall or get hurt. In a little more than ten days, she was leaving; she had to stay whole. Even twisting an ankle was unacceptable.

"Done struggling?" he said, revealing no emotion.

She stayed silent.

He bent down to let the water flow, then picked up the showerhead to rinse her off. The last of the bubbles slid away, leaving her utterly exposed.

She glared at him warily. "Don't make me hate you!"

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Vance gave a bitter smile. "You don't hate me enough already?"

Rebecca said nothing, acknowledging their marriage had reached a point beyond repair.

He wrapped her in a towel, carried her out of the bathroom, and set her on the edge of the bed. Then he walked back into the bathroom.

Nancy had changed the sheets, but Rebecca's hair was still dripping. She needed to dry it.

"Nancy?" she called out.

The hairdryer was in the bathroom. She refused to go back in and face Vance again, hoping Nancy would come to help.

But it was Vance who appeared, hairdryer in hand. "I told you Nancy won't be coming in tonight."

He plugged it in, letting the warm air blow on her hair. She blinked in confusion, wondering what he was up to. Trying to win her over? Or was this still about Catherine?

Neither of them spoke. The only sound filling the room was the roar of the hairdryer.

While she had nothing left to say, she could guess what Vance might say and saw no point in hearing it.

Vance dried her hair with clumsy care, switching sides randomly and tugging a few times, but he eventually finished.

“Where is your hair tie?” he asked.

She blinked, confused.

Without waiting for her response, he rummaged through the drawer and found one. Then he gathered her hair on top of her head and tied it into a messy bun.

Her neck, shoulders, and part of her back were exposed. He stared at the bruises, then turned her toward the mirror. “Look what that so-called rehab did to you.”

He spun her around so she could see the dark marks on her back. “See?”

They were from falling or bumping into equipment during the exercises. But why did he care?

Suddenly, he yanked the towel away. She snatched the blanket and wrapped it around herself, glaring at him. “Touch me again, and you’ll regret it!”

He sat across from her, a smirk playing on his lips. “Five years of marriage, and this is how you react when I touch you?”

What other reaction did he expect? She laughed coldly. “If you touch me, won’t Catherine be heartbroken?”

Not answering, he leaned over and pressed her down onto the bed, but he didn’t pull the blanket away. His warm palm settled on her thigh and began gently massaging the bruises.

She froze, recognizing this pattern. Flattery rarely came without ulterior motives; he clearly wanted something.

He applied ointment to the bruises, starting from her thigh, then to her arms, stomach, and back. Once he finished, he tucked the blanket around her and met her cold stare.

She waited for the inevitable request to drop the case. Instead, he adjusted the blanket and muttered, “How did we end up here?”

Did he really not know?

He sighed, “Let’s talk calmly.”

She paused, reflecting. Since Catherine’s return, she had been the calm one, and he had kept losing control.

“I don’t know what there is left to talk about,” she said. “I’ve made my point clear enough.”

He slid his hand under the blanket and found hers. “I never wanted it this way. From the very beginning, I wanted to build a real life with you.”

“Really?” she scoffed. “From the beginning, I was the evil woman who tricked you into marriage, remember?”

He fell silent, shutting his eyes.

She continued, “Mr. Bradford, please let go of my hand and bring me the rubbing alcohol.”

When Vance opened his eyes, the red veins in them were more pronounced. These past few days had clearly been exhausting as he tried every means to exonerate Catherine.

Without a word, he fetched the bottle and handed it over. She propped herself up, took the alcohol, and began spraying it on her hands, arms, legs, stomach, and back-everywhere he had just touched. Even her hair received a generous spritz.

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Vance’s face darkened. “What are you doing?”

“Disinfecting. I told you your hands are dirty,” Rebecca said flatly, setting the bottle on the nightstand.

He stared at her, once again provoked by her defiance.

She turned away and lay down, indifferent to his reaction. The fresh bedding had a light fragrance that enveloped her in comfort.

After a long silence, he spoke. “I have a few questions to ask you.”

She kept her eyes closed and did not respond. He continued, “How did you get the surveillance footage?”

Of course. He hadn't come home at this hour for any tender reason, and naturally, she would not answer him.

"I had no idea you were capable of this. Who helped you? Desmond?" he demanded sternly.

"No," she finally responded, unwilling to let him drag an innocent person into it.

"Then who? Tell me!" He wouldn't rest until he got the answers.

"You're wasting your breath. I won't say anything."

"Don't be foolish. With today's technology, I can find out everything."

She rolled over to face him, defiant. "No, you can't."

She waved her phone in front of him. "The police could, of course. Feel free to hand it over to them."

She knew he wouldn't. He was too busy trying to absolve Catherine.

Now that the evidence clearly implicated Catherine in attempted murder, he could hardly push the case further with the police.

Rebecca was certain he still hoped for a private settlement.

When she turned her back to him again, he sighed, "I know you don't want to withdraw the case. I didn't plan to push you, but I really don't want us to meet in court. We've been married for five years. I never mistreated you, did I?"

Her heart tightened. She refused to revisit those years.

"I'm grateful you saved me back then, and I appreciate the opportunity you gave me to repay you," he continued. "I gave you everything I could. So, could you please do me a favor? I'll grant any request."

She called him out, "You want me to drop the case and reconcile with Catherine and your cronies?"

"Exactly." He nodded. "I'm sorry, but I must protect her. She was the only light in the darkest time of my life."

Her heart sank. What was he thinking, telling her that another woman was his light and expecting her help?

“You know my grandmother was the most important person in my world,” he explained. “Cathy and her mother saved my grandma’s life. Her mother was the attending doctor during my grandmother’s illness. At that time, I had already cut ties with my family. My parents ignored her completely, and I was still in high school. I had to run to the hospital three times a day with food.”

He paused and continued, “Later, my grandma told me I only needed to go in the evenings because volunteers helped during the day. One evening when I visited her, I saw a bottle of origami cranes by her pillow. She said a volunteer had given them to her, saying that the blessings of a thousand paper cranes would ensure her recovery.”

His voice cracked. “She didn’t recover. Those paper cranes were only wishes. Do you understand how lonely I felt, carrying everything alone? The person who helped lighten that burden and brighten my gray world was Cathy. I thought I’d never see her again, but then I ran into her in college. So, no matter who she is now, she will always be that light in my heart.”

Rebecca listened quietly, unable to suppress a laugh. Was he so sure the volunteer who folded those cranes had been Catherine?

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What was youthful infatuation like?

It was the hollow ache when Vance didn’t come to class. The empty seat beside her made the whole room feel hollow.

It was the way the world brightened the moment he walked in, sunlight turning to gold but never as bright as him.

Her heart melted when he smiled, and it twisted when he frowned.

It was watching him from a distance, content, while quietly wanting to give him everything without ever letting him know.

That year, the exhaustion he tried so hard to hide came from his grandmother’s illness. She put on a mask before dawn every day, rushed to the hospital after lunch, brought food, helped wash and clean, and pretended to be a volunteer.

She wasn’t sure a thousand paper cranes could bring luck, but she still believed in beautiful things. So, she secretly folded a whole bottle of them for his grandmother. 1

There were certainly not a thousand, but the bottle was full. On every slip of paper, she had written a blessing before folding it into a crane. 2

While she prayed for his grandmother's recovery, she also prayed for Josette's health.

Back then, she had thought she and Vance were so alike. They were both abandoned by their parents, relied on their grandmothers, and fought to keep their pride while the wind tried to knock them down.

She had imagined their roots tangled together deep underground, even if their branches never touched.

In the end, it had all been her own wishful thinking. She smiled bitterly, giving no explanation.

If this had been years ago, when he mentioned the cranes, she might have told him the truth. But now, there was no point.

She had sacrificed a leg so he could escape from beneath the wheels. If he saw that as a mere ploy to make him marry her, then what did those paper cranes mean to him?

Were they just another trick, like the pumpkin pies from Halloween, to win him over? Even if he didn't think of her that way, what difference would it make? He simply didn't love her.

She had spent five years proving it. That rescue was something he experienced firsthand. No matter what his intentions were in marrying her, the outcome remained unchanged. So, why add more complications?

She met him at 15, and now 12 years had passed. If love were meant to blossom, it would have done so by now. The truth was, no matter what she did for him, he wouldn't fall for her.

Any further discussion would only turn into a joke. Moreover, she now had a clear vision for her future and plans laid out. It was time to sever ties with him and all this drama.

A bitter laugh escaped her mouth as she entertained those thoughts.

"What are you laughing about?" Vance, lost in his own memories, seemed shocked and irritated that his heartfelt story had elicited nothing but her laughter.

Rebecca lowered her gaze, but a smile lingered on her lips. "Nothing, just touched. Wish you guys happiness."

"You..." He was unsure whether she was being sarcastic.

“I’m serious.” She lay back on the bed, looking up at him. The faint sadness in her eyes faded, replaced by sincerity. “I hope you guys grow old together.”

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Rebecca wished they would be tightly locked together.

Vance stared at her, stunned. After a long moment, he whispered her name, as if testing whether she meant it.

“It’s late. I’m going to sleep now,” she said, deciding to leave him reminiscing about his light.

“Wait,” he said, not ready to give up, but she had already rolled over.

He persisted, his voice low and pleading. “We’ve known each other for 12 years. For the sake of all those years and for the times we understood each other, can’t you drop the case?”

It was rare for him to let go of his pride, even using past feelings as leverage.

The old ache flared, but she kept her voice even. “You want to trade? I drop the case, and our 12 years are wiped clean?”

Silence enveloped the night. She waited, but he didn’t answer.

Fatigue made her drowsy. She couldn’t concern herself with what else he might say. Her eyelids grew heavier, and she quickly fell into a deep sleep.

She had no idea when he went to bed, only vaguely hearing him speak on the phone. His voice was low and muffled. She couldn’t hear clearly, but she didn’t care.

The next day, she woke up feeling much better. The soreness was still there, but bearable.

She planned to go to the clinic for her therapy sessions and rehab, then went to Josette’s place. After breakfast, as she was sorting through her things, someone entered the house.

Nancy was tidying up, so the only person who could come in like that was Vance. So, she didn’t turn around until a voice called out, “Rebecca.”

It was Catherine, who somehow knew the code of the door and walked in freely.

Anger surged within Rebecca, then died. She would sell the house anyway. Getting mad was just pointless, doing nothing but hurt herself.

As Catherine entered the living room, Nancy looked at Rebecca anxiously, as if saying, “I don’t know how she got in.”

Rebecca signaled to her that it was fine. Nancy got the implication and stepped aside.

Rebecca turned to the uninvited guest, who couldn’t be there with any good intentions. It was especially true since Vance wasn’t around.

Catherine stood still, silent. Her eyes were filled with hostility. Unfazed, Rebecca finished packing and started for the door.

As she passed, Catherine snapped, “Didn’t you see me?”

Rebecca paused. “I did.”

She knew that Catherine wouldn’t be able to hold back forever. In confrontations, impatience would always lead to failure.

“Don’t you have anything to say?”

“Oh, Vance isn’t home.”

“I’m not here for him.”

Rebecca looked around. “Then who? Nancy?”

Nancy flinched at her words, and Catherine huffed, “I’m looking for you! Can’t you tell?”

“Me? We’re not even close. Excuse me. I have things to do.” Rebecca kept walking toward the door.

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“You’re not leaving!” Catherine rushed to the foyer and blocked the door.

Rebecca halted, looking at her calmly.

Catherine's eyes burned with anger. "Do you really think that if you get me locked up, Vance will love you?"

Rebecca smiled faintly, seeing no need to explain herself.

"You think it's funny? You think you've won?" Catherine continued, her voice rising. "Dream on. Even if I go to prison, he won't forget me. He'll only hate you more."

Rebecca studied the furious woman in front of her. The words had no power anymore. Vance's attitude or preferences could no longer affect her.

She smiled again, satisfied with her progress, but that only infuriated Catherine further.

"Do you have any idea how much he loves me?" Catherine huffed. "I left him five years ago, and when I returned, he still cherished me. Look around-the whole house was decorated to my taste. The code on the door? My birthday."

"The deed is in my name," Rebecca responded flatly.

Catherine choked. "After five years, he still remembers the 100 promises he made to me. He wants to finish every unfinished thing we planned. He knows exactly what I like to eat and what colors I love. He never buys me the wrong clothes or shoes. If I want roast duck confit from Arelmoor today, he'll buy tickets and fly me there tonight."

Rebecca nodded. "Sounds like true love."

Catherine smiled smugly, but Rebecca sighed dramatically, "Too bad you don't have the marriage certificate."

"What do you have besides a piece of paper?" Catherine sneered. "Does he love you? One word from me, and he'll get anything I want-luxury bags, expensive watches, and villas. He'll do anything to satisfy my needs."

"So all those unfinished things, all the luxury items, the watches, and the villas-he's paying for everything?" Rebecca asked deliberately.

"Of course!" Catherine lifted her chin proudly. "He never hesitates. As long as I ask, his money flows straight to me."

Rebecca lowered her head, pulled out her phone, and waved it. "Thank you for that testimony. And I'm sure all those purchases are nicely documented. Sorry, but my advantage is that I can sue to reclaim marital assets. I'll take back every penny spent on your unfinished business, your designer bags, your watches, and your villas."

Catherine's face paled. "You wouldn't dare!"

“What’s there to be afraid of?” Rebecca countered. “A lawyer will do the trick, and I’ll use Vance’s money to hire them.”

“W-What else do you have besides money? You gold-digger!” Catherine shouted in exasperation.

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Rebecca remained composed. “Yes, but unfortunately for you, Vance’s money is legally mine too.”

She felt a little childish saying it, like kids fighting over toys. It seemed rather pointless. Honestly, she wouldn’t even want to confront Catherine if the latter hadn’t come charging at her like that.

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If there were any grudges, they had always been between Rebecca and Vance. Yet Catherine kept clawing at her, even trying to kill her.

Catherine stared at Rebecca’s phone warily. “Delete the recordings now!”

Rebecca slipped the phone into her bag, not showing Catherine anything. Catherine lunged, convinced a cripple couldn’t beat her.

Rebecca resisted, and Nancy rushed over to help. Just then, the sound of the door unlocking cut through the tension.

It was Vance returning home. The moment he walked in, Catherine stumbled to the ground and teared up. “Vance...”

Along with him came the property security guard, who had been called over by Nancy at Rebecca’s signal. Rebecca had anticipated that Catherine might go off the rails, but she hadn’t expected Vance to come back.

Sitting on the floor, Catherine sobbed, “I-I just wanted to apologize to Rebecca. She wouldn’t listen and wanted to kick me out.”

Rebecca sighed, tired of the same trick. Who would believe her nonsense? Yet there were fools in this world.

The guard glanced between them, hesitating. “Mr. Bradford...”

Vance helped Catherine to her feet and told him, “This is a family matter. I’ll handle it myself. Thank you.”

“Okay, just call me if you need anything,” the guard told Rebecca, somewhat aware of the family’s situation.

While he wouldn’t pry into their privacy, he knew the hostess had mobility issues. That tilted his sympathy toward her side.

“Thank you.” Rebecca nodded politely.

After the guard left, Vance closed the door. “Let’s all sit down.”

As Nancy helped Rebecca to a chair, Catherine suddenly yelped, stumbled, and fell again.

Vance frowned. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” She struggled to stand up, acting as if she were enduring great pain. But the moment she got up, she fell right back down.

He rushed over to help her. “Did you hurt yourself?”

Seizing the opportunity, she leaned into him and spoke timidly. “It’s nothing. Rebecca accidentally pushed me earlier. I might have sprained my ankle, but I’m fine, really.”

She winced theatrically. Vance sighed, “You always pretend to be strong even when you’re hurting. You think too much of other people.”

Rebecca rolled her eyes. She was the one with the real disability and hadn’t said a word. Catherine was putting on a show, yet Vance was blind to it.

Catherine’s eyes glistened. “I just didn’t want to make things difficult for you.”

He helped her to the sofa, his voice soothing. “I know. I understand everything.”

Rebecca was frustrated about his cluelessness.

“Nancy,” Vance began to issue orders, “get the ointment and treat her injury.”

But Nancy refused to comply, standing firmly beside Rebecca.

“Nancy?” Vance stressed his tone.

Nancy shook but held her ground. “Sir, you hired me to care for Mrs. Bradford, not to serve an indecent woman.” 1

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Nancy's words left Rebecca utterly stunned.

Since becoming their housekeeper, Nancy had always been kind and loyal, advising Rebecca from time to time. She had never openly defied Vance before. After all, her paycheck came from him.

Yet now, she held Rebecca's arm, trembling slightly but resolutely defying Vance's order.

Catherine bit her lip and lowered her head, the picture of wounded innocence. Vance couldn't stand to see her like this. His expression darkened, clouds gathering in his eyes as he radiated pressure.

"Nancy, you don't want your job anymore?" he snapped.

Nancy flinched but didn't back down.

Vance's eyes narrowed. "And your daughter... She doesn't want to go to school anymore?"

That was Nancy's greatest fear. She had fled an abusive marriage in the countryside and came to the city with her daughter, aiming for a better life.

Because of her attentive care for Rebecca, Vance had used his connections to get the girl into a good school. Using that against Nancy now was downright despicable.

"Vance Bradford!" Rebecca snapped. "Threatening her with her child? Have you no shame?"

With detached calmness, he looked down on her. "No employers would keep defiant and disrespectful employees, would they?"

"You..." Rebecca tried to protest.

"That's enough," he interrupted. "Either she apologizes to Catherine right now, or she packs her things and leaves. Adults don't get to have it both ways."

Catherine sniffled, tugging at his sleeve. "Please don't pressure Nancy. She must have misunderstood. I've barely met her. How could she call me indecent unless someone told her to?"

She shot Rebecca a provocative glance, implying Rebecca had poisoned Nancy against her. Rebecca understood the subtext, and so did Vance.

His gaze swung to her, and she laughed mockingly. “What? You think I bad-mouthed your goddess behind your back? Want me to apologize?”

Catherine clung to Vance’s arm. “No, I don’t need her apology. I came here to apologize to her. Please don’t fight because of me. I can’t bear it if you two argue.”

“Of course you can’t bear it,” Rebecca interjected. “You’d rather I was dead.”

“Rebecca!” Vance barked. “Do you know how serious a murder charge is? How can you pin something so grave on her?”

“She tried to burn me alive!” she shot back. “Why should I hold back?”

“I’ve told you a thousand times it was an accident!” His anger flared. “She came to apologize. What more do you want?”

“Apologize?” She stared straight at Catherine. “You came to apologize. I refused, and we scuffled at the door. You couldn’t handle me and fell, correct?”

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