

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 141

“Maybe you were just careless,” Catherine stammered, turning to Vance. “She probably didn’t mean it.”

Rebecca laughed. “Do you believe that?”

When he didn’t respond, she pressed on. “Do you seriously believe a cripple could overpower someone bouncing with energy?”

“I didn’t use much force,” Catherine chimed in. “I knew her leg wasn’t good, and Nancy was helping her.”

Vance ignored their back-and-forth. He dropped into a chair, his face thunderous. “What’s done is done. There’s no need to rehash it. Right now, there’s one option available for Nancy.”

“What option?” Rebecca said, fighting the urge to hurl the glass of water on the coffee table at his face.” Why not go over it again? Because you know Catherine is lying. There are cameras in the house. Check your phone, and you’ll see exactly what happened. Stop pretending. The two of you have no right to bargain with me.”

She was done with them. She didn’t want to curse or rage, but couldn’t they go back to their own little world and leave her alone?

“Rebecca!” Vance rapped his knuckles on the coffee table. “The details don’t matter now. The only option left is that Nancy leaves, and her daughter loses her spot at school. Unless, of course, you help her.”

Rebecca understood his meaning. The facts didn’t matter because his heart had already chosen sides.

“You know what? I was wrong to discuss right and wrong with you,” she said. “In your eyes, Catherine is flawless. Even when she’s wrong, you’ll find a thousand excuses for her. Fine. How do I help Nancy? By dropping the case? If I agree, she keeps her job, and her daughter keeps her school?”

“Yes,” he confirmed.

“Madam...” Nancy calmed down, tears brimming in her eyes. “Please don’t let me affect any of your decisions. I’ll leave now. There’s nothing to pack. I’ll pick up my daughter after school. Just take care of yourself.”

She hated the thought of leaving. She had worked here for five stable years, and her daughter had finally gotten into a good school in a big city. So, how could she bear to give that up?

But she had escaped a violent, cheating husband. She couldn't let Rebecca make the same sacrifice for her.

She could leave, believing there would always be a way forward. After escaping such a hellish existence, she was no longer afraid of anything. Yet, she felt a sense of loss, worried the next housekeeper would not attend to Rebecca so well.

"Nancy, you don't have to rush," Rebecca said gently.

"Madam, I'm determined. I may be insignificant, but I..." Nancy shook her head, unsure how to put it, "I

Chanie" 141 have my principles."

Rebecca thought for a moment. "Don't fret. Your daughter's tuition for this semester is already paid. She can finish the term, and summer break is coming. You don't need to pick her up today. As for Vance's offer..."

The pair leaned forward, looking at her eagerly. She paused, then said, "I can drop the case."

Catherine's face lit up, and Vance's shoulders eased. But Nancy remained worried, afraid Rebecca was compromising because of her.

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Rebecca squeezed Nancy's hand, silently urging her to stay calm. "But I have my demands."

"Name them," Vance said firmly, ready to pay any price for Catherine.

Rebecca stared straight ahead, ignoring the eagerness in his eyes. "First, Catherine must leave your company permanently. She can never work there again, hold any shares, or have you open a branch for her."

That didn't touch their core interests, so Vance agreed instantly, "That's fine."

Rebecca went on. "Second, every dollar you've spent on Catherine-from luxury items to property-is a marital asset. I will reclaim it all. And from today forward, you cannot give her money for any reason."

That was a death blow for Catherine. If Vance were a broke nobody, would she have looked at him twice?

"No!" she burst out, then caught herself. "I mean, those gifts were meaningful to me. I can't bear to part with them. And my house has traces of our life together."

Traces of their life together? Even at this point, she was trying to disgust Rebecca.

Rebecca smiled slightly and pointed above her head. "This place has surveillance, and you just admitted you lived with Vance. That's extra evidence for my bigamy lawsuit. I thought pursuing that would be difficult, but thanks to you, it is much easier."

Catherine's face drained of color. "You said you'd drop the case!"

"I only said I'd drop yours," Rebecca smirked. "What happens between Vance and me is none of your business, is it?"

"How is it none of my business? Aren't you planning to leave him?" Catherine caught herself, realizing she had slipped.

After all, she had always portrayed herself as wanting nothing more than a place in Vance's heart, though keeping her true intentions hidden felt suffocating.

She glared, wishing she could bore holes into Rebecca with her eyes. Rebecca ignored her, turning to Vance. "What do you say?"

His expression soured as this request undoubtedly cut deep. Rebecca took her time, waiting patiently.

Finally, he clenched his teeth and said, "Fine."

"Third..." She paused, contemplating.

His eyes narrowed. "You're not asking for a divorce, are you?"

At that word, Catherine's eyes glinted with greed. Yet Rebecca refused to grant their wishes. "No, I'm not."

She missed Vance's expression. But the hope in Catherine's eyes died, replaced by fury.

Rebecca went on. "I want your promise that you will never marry Catherine."

This demand was purely to torment them. Once she left, they could do whatever they wanted; she wouldn't care. For now, their frustration brought her satisfaction.

Catherine's face was flushed with panic. "Vance..."

She was worried he would agree in the heat of the moment, but he remained silent, staring at Rebecca.

"Vance!" Catherine called out again, desperation creeping into her voice.

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Vance snapped out of it. "I agree."

Catherine looked devastated, biting her lip so hard it nearly bled.

Rebecca raised an eyebrow. "How do we make this legally binding? It can't just be words."

Vance frowned. "You don't trust me? My word is my bond."

She was unimpressed. "You have zero credibility with me."

His face fell, and she continued, "I've laid out my demands. Now it's your turn to act. First, write everything down clearly. Whether you find a lawyer or get it notarized, make it legally enforceable. Then fulfill each point. And once the house and luxury items are sold, the money comes to me. Convert any travel spending into cash for me. Complete everything within one week. If you miss the deadline, don't blame me for going back on my word."

She remembered something and added, "And if you try to threaten me with Nancy again, it won't work. The things you can do? I can manage too. Test me if you doubt it."

Vance smiled mockingly. "You? What can you possibly do? Begging that dancing nobleman for help?"

His tone grated on her nerves. "Who I ask for help is none of your business."

"Don't forget you're my wife! If it weren't my business, you wouldn't have the right to make any demands at all," he hissed, standing up. "Let's go, Cathy."

Just before stepping out, Catherine shot one last venomous glare over her shoulder.

“Bye.” Rebecca lifted her chin, not caring where they were headed.

Only Nancy and Rebecca were left in the now quiet room.

Distressed, Nancy wiped her tears. “Madam, I’m sorry. This is all my fault, making you compromise and drop the case.”

“It’s not your fault,” Rebecca reassured her. “I never intended to cling to it forever. Honestly, I’m glad. After everything, there are still people willing to stand by me.”

Nancy was still upset. “But you nearly got hurt.”

“I’m fine now, aren’t I?” Rebecca replied, her eyes sparkling. “But you really should think about what comes next.”

“Madam?” Nancy blinked, but Rebecca didn’t elaborate.

Before leaving this place, she couldn’t let anyone else know, except Josette. But if Nancy had nowhere to go, she would arrange things.

As for dropping the case... They would see how things played out.

At the company, Catherine packed her things, sitting glumly with her belongings in her lap.

Aiden sat beside her, trying to console her. “Relax and trust Vance. If he agreed, he must have a plan.”

Catherine stayed sullen. What plan could there be when not marrying Vance was already the worst outcome?

Vance walked over. “Come on, let’s get dinner.”

Aiden pulled him aside and whispered, “You really agreed to all those terms? Even not marrying Cathy?”

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“Yes,” Vance replied. “We can hire the best legal team to minimize her liability, but it’s impossible to erase every trace.”

Aiden gritted his teeth. "Cathy is perfect. How can there be even a small stain on her life? She can't be detained or even fined. She couldn't handle that kind of hardship."

"Exactly. Rebecca's demands are straightforward. Anything involving money isn't a problem." Vance looked relaxed, believing it was easy to handle.

"But you can't agree to never marry Cathy." Aiden looked back at her, pained by her sad expression.

Vance smiled bitterly. "I don't plan to marry anyone else."

Aiden furrowed his brows, pondering until he finally understood. He hurried over to Catherine and whispered, "Vance said that even if he doesn't marry you, he won't marry anyone else. What are you worried about? You're his only one."

But Catherine remained troubled. Words were cheap. Marriage offered real security.

Take the earlier event, for example. Rebecca had stood tall because she held the marriage certificate and could reclaim everything Vance had given Catherine.

Without that certificate, how could Catherine ever have such confidence? And her future children would always be labeled illegitimate.

"What are you still worried about?" Aiden teased her.

Catherine couldn't voice her true thoughts. She could only mutter, "If I leave the company, what about my income?"

"That's nothing to worry about! Vance can support you," Aiden laughed. "Besides, what skills do you even have? You've been at the company for so long. What work have you actually done? You just sit at your desk doing makeup, online shopping, or watching live streams."

Catherine was frustrated that he couldn't understand her fear.

He added, "Rest assured. With Vance around, you'll never lack for anything. He'll figure it all out."

Vance approached. "What are you two whispering about?"

"Catherine is worried about her future," Aiden grinned. "I told her with us around, how could she ever go hungry? Right?"

"Of course." Vance nodded.

"Let's go eat! We'll grab Lucas!" Aiden called, leading the way.

Catherine glared at him, sulking. She didn't just want survival; she wanted wealth, status, and the title of

Mrs. Bradford.

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"Why are you looking at Aiden like that? Did he upset you?" Vance asked, noticing.

She quickly averted her gaze, putting on a hurt and timid expression. "No, I just feel guilty for causing you so much trouble."

"How could that be?" he replied softly. "Everyone dotes on you. How could you ever be a burden?"

"Come on! Let's go celebrate the win!" Aiden and Lucas caught up, their usual swagger on full display. "Are you treating us, boss?"

"Sure," Vance chuckled.

It had always been this way. Since college, he had been their leader, more like family than friends. Over the years, he had shouldered everything for them.

The group headed to their usual restaurant. Meanwhile, Rebecca had planned to go to Josette's but decided to wait until the chaos was settled.

After the therapy and rehab sessions, she returned home instead.

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Vance returned home late that night.

Rebecca was watching a mindless drama, the kind that required zero brainpower. She noticed with dark amusement how the plot mirrored her own life: the brilliant, cunning male lead turning utterly blind the moment the female supporting character appeared. The details differed, but the outcome was the same.

The male lead was played like a fool, which reminded her of Vance. It was ridiculously funny, and she couldn't help but laugh.

Vance walked in and caught the sound. She heard his footsteps and braced for sarcasm, given how miserable Catherine was that day.

Rebecca was the cause. He would surely lash out.

He didn't. Instead, he entered with his briefcase in hand, loosening his tie as he asked, "What are you watching that's so funny?"

"Oh, just some fools acting," she replied.

Fools like him and his friends.

He chuckled, "Looks like you're quite happy when you're alone."

"Why wouldn't I be?" She set down her tablet. "What person or situation could make me unhappy?"

"I'm not here to fight," he sighed. "Everything is ready. We'll go to the law firm tomorrow to sign, and it will become binding."

He pulled a stack of papers from his briefcase and tossed them to her. "Check if there's anything you want to add."

She scanned the contract. It was exactly as she had demanded. True to his professionalism, the wording was concise and straightforward, clearly outlining the three demands she had previously mentioned. It was meticulously drafted without any ambiguities.

She read it three times to make sure he hadn't slipped in any word games. The clause requiring her to drop the case was spelled out in exhaustive detail, including the date of the report and the reasons. He had left no loopholes, but neither had he set any traps for her.

She took so long that Vance finally sat down across from her, rolling up his sleeves. "Still not clear? Should I hire a lawyer to review it for loopholes for you?"

"That's a good idea," she said. "I'll hire one myself tomorrow. No need to trouble you."

He sighed in frustration, "Am I that untrustworthy? I don't recall ever letting you down."

"Trust? Ask your conscience about that." She neatly filed both copies.

He watched her, a half-smile on his lips. “I spoke with a lawyer friend of mine about this contract today.

He was shocked. Said he’d never handled anything like it.”

He had approached his lawyer friend anyway. The lawyer had laughed and doubted if such a notarization even existed.

“They should be shocked.” She shrugged. “When have they ever met someone as shameless as you?”

He shook his head. “Shameless or not, I’m not sure. But you’re getting sharper every day.”

When she didn’t respond, he leaned closer. “You barely spoke a word in high school. I thought you were such an honest person. When did you become so fierce?”

Fierce? Of course, it was thanks to him.

She gripped the contracts tightly. “I know you think this is absurd, but let me tell you something. I don’t care whether it holds up in court. In the eyes of our friends and the entire internet, it’s perfectly valid. If you breach it, even if the court does nothing, public opinion won’t let you go. Catherine can look forward to becoming an internet sensation

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Vance seemed to be in a surprisingly good mood. Rebecca’s words didn’t anger him at all.

He loosened his collar, rolled up his sleeves, and lounged against the sofa, a faint smile at the corners of his eyes.

“I watched the surveillance from today,” he said, narrowing his eyes slightly.

So what? He would surely find some excuse to defend Catherine.

He pulled out his phone and began tapping away. Rebecca’s phone vibrated with a notification. She checked it and saw he had transferred her one million dollars.

“Catherine acted impulsively, but she was upset and under pressure from the case. You, on the other hand, acted superior and refused to let go.” He set the phone down. “I apologize on her behalf, Mrs. Bradford.”

His tone dripped with mockery, but it was exactly what she had expected. He always justified Catherine’s actions and called Rebecca unreasonable. Arguing was pointless.

But a million dollars as hush money was a nice windfall. No one turned down easy money. Love? That was something that never existed between them. She would not pursue it.

She accepted the transfer and headed to her room to sleep. Vance followed, speaking lazily. “For that million, can’t you at least get me something to eat?”

Rebecca didn’t believe for a second that he hadn’t eaten out. Catherine had been upset; he must have spent the evening soothing her.

“Nancy is asleep. Be a good capitalist and don’t disturb her,” she said bluntly.

“I never said I’d bother her. Can’t you at least get me a glass of milk?” he insisted, hovering behind her.

“The milk is in the fridge. Go get it yourself.”

“I want it warm. Can’t you warm it for me?”

She spun around. “You don’t have hands? You can cook for Catherine, but you can’t warm up a glass of milk?”

They stood face to face, his expression inscrutable. In the next second, he reached out and pinched her face with a playful smile. “Women really are unreasonable when they’re jealous. Have I never cooked for you? Who made dinner at Josette’s?”

She swatted his hand away, not jealous at all. She simply couldn’t resist pushing back.

He scooped her up, dropped her onto the bed, and leaned over, the smell of alcohol assailing her nostrils.

“And what about that drumstick I cooked for you in high school?” he murmured.

He had been drinking again. No wonder he was acting strangely.

“Whose stomach did it end up in, you ungrateful little thing?” he whined, pressing down on her.

“That’s enough,” she said, trying to stop the trip down memory lane.

Now he wanted to reminisce about high school? Hadn’t he claimed every action she took back then was to chase him? She couldn’t bear it.

“I don’t remember anything from high school,” she added.

He hovered above her, close enough that she could see the dark intensity in his eyes. “You don’t remember?”

“No,” she confirmed, unwilling to revisit those memories.

He brushed the hair that had fallen across her face and cupped her cheeks. The faint scent of alcohol clung to his fingertips.

“It’s no wonder Aiden says women can destroy the world when they get jealous,” he sighed. “Keep pretending you’re tough.”

“Vance,” she enunciated, “I’ll say it again. I am not jealous.”

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Vance chuckled, clearly not believing her.

“Only someone in love gets jealous,” Rebecca said, staring at the ceiling.

The image of that boy under the osmanthus tree flashed across her mind. The leaves rustled, dancing with the breeze. The boy and the girl were sharing pumpkin pies.

“Vance, I don’t love you anymore,” she muttered.

The words carried a quiet ache-the final farewell to the lovesick girl she had once been. “Hey, me from 12 years ago. Today I’m telling you: you loved the wrong person. But I’ve corrected my mistake.”

“Silly girl,” he said, ruffling her hair. “I’m going to take a shower.”

As he got up and headed to the bathroom, Rebecca settled down to sleep.

Her phone buzzed. Jenny was back from her business trip, wanting to have dinner with her.

Rebecca chatted with her, recalling their time as deskmates in middle school and how they had remained friends through college. Even after her marriage to Vance, Jenny had reached out a few times, but she had turned down every invitation.

Jenny: [Why did you stop going out and lose touch with everyone? Did Vance lock you away?]

Rebecca: [Of course not.]

The truth about her leg was something very few classmates in high school knew. She hadn't invited any of them to her wedding and hadn't seen them since. Most only knew that she had gotten married.

Now that she was meeting Jenny, she felt she should explain. She mentioned her leg, but not the cause.

Jenny: [What happened?]

Rebecca sidestepped the question. Jenny sensed her reluctance and dropped the subject, confirming their dinner plans.

After setting a date, they exchanged goodnights. Closing the chat window, Rebecca pondered Jenny's earlier question: "What happened?"

A swirl of emotions rose. On impulse, she posted on social media: [Saved a dog five years ago.]

Jenny commented immediately: [So that's why.]

Rebecca paused, unsure how to reply. Jenny then sent her a screenshot of her post, asking: [Is this what it's about?]

Rebecca: [Yes.]

Jenny: [Can we talk?]

Rebecca called Jenny, hearing her voice again after five years. A wave of nostalgia hit her.

"I'm okay," she said. "It's all in the past."

Just then, Vance emerged from the bathroom and climbed into bed.

"I don't know how to say this..." Jenny started.

He wrapped his arms around Rebecca's waist from behind and whispered, "Mrs. Bradford..."

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Vance's low, husky voice carried an unexpected intimacy.

On the phone, Jenny heard it and quickly said, "That's Vance, right? Never mind, I won't keep you. See you tomorrow night. Bye."

She hung up fast, clearly not wanting to intrude on their private time.

"Who are you meeting tomorrow?" Vance asked, having overheard their conversation.

His gaze landed on the phone screen that displayed the contact's name: Jenny.

"Jenny Moore?"

"Yeah."

"So, you're in touch with her? Dinner tomorrow night?"

"Mm-hmm."

"That's good. It's healthy to reconnect with old friends instead of staying shut in all the time."

That was not what he used to say. He had never said that in front of their classmates. Wasn't he afraid the crippled wife would embarrass him?

He didn't seem to be worried now, probably because he already had someone presentable at his side. And that person was Catherine.

He moved closer. The scent of her bath foam mixed with the alcohol on his breath. "Have you considered being a real Mrs. Bradford?"

She paused in shock. His hand slipped beneath her nightgown, and understanding hit her like ice water.

She shoved his head off her shoulder. "Wake up!"

He pulled back, falling silent and making no further moves. A while later, as she was drifting off, he shook her awake. "Look what you posted! What does this mean?"

Groggy, she turned to look at his phone that displayed a screenshot of her earlier post, captioned: [Saved a dog five years ago.]

But he had accidentally minimized it, revealing a group chat instead. She caught a glimpse of the messages.

It was the group with his friends, titled: Life, Death, and Loyalty.

Aiden had sent the screenshot, tagging him: [Check out what Rebecca says about you!]

Lucas: [You've spoiled her too much!]

Catherine: [Vance, don't get upset. Did I provoke her again?]

She was as phony as ever.

Rebecca turned back to the pillow, but Vance was relentless. "Don't sleep! Explain yourself! What do you mean by this?"

"Literal meaning," she muttered with her eyes closed.

"Literal meaning?" he grunted, turning her to face him. "Can a dog give you money? Can a dog provide food and clothing? Can a dog support your entire life?"

She opened her eyes and met his gaze. "I can earn my own money, provide for myself, and build my own life. If I save a dog, it will be loyal to me and will always be there for me. You know what? I'm deleting that post. It's an insult to dogs."

Ever since Catherine appeared, she had rarely spoken to him this openly.

His eyes darkened, and he grabbed her shoulders. "So, you regret it? Regret saving me?"

"Wasn't that my scheme to marry you?" she scoffed. "Consider it a failed plan."

Vance stared at her, silent for what felt like an eternity.

She pushed his hand away and turned over. "It's late. Time to sleep. If you're having second thoughts, maybe you should bring up divorce when we see the lawyer tomorrow."

The rehabilitation left her exhausted, and she slept like a log. The next morning, she woke up to find it was already ten o'clock.

Vance was still home, engrossed in something on his phone.

"Breakfast is ready. Don't say I never cook for you." He glanced at her, then turned back to his phone.

On the table were two slices of toast-one with arugula, smoked salmon, and caviar, the other with pesto, scrambled eggs, and cheese. There was no milk, only a glass of juice.

The caviar was rich, the salmon was perfectly seared, and the eggs were soft the way she liked. The pesto had a fresh, chunky texture-not store-bought.

Nancy wasn't skilled at making such food, so it had to be Vance who made them.

With relish, she finished both slices.

Vance wasn't quite into such food, yet he had made it perfectly. There was only one explanation. Catherine liked it.

But who cared?

Vance stood up. "Should we find a lawyer to review the contract?"

"No need." She set her glass down. "But I want to add something to the third clause. Besides never marrying Catherine, it should state that if you break the agreement and marry her-or even have a child with her-all your assets become mine."

He smiled, but it didn't reach his eyes. "You're being a little harsh, aren't you? You won't bear my child, and you don't want anyone else to either. Isn't that a little unreasonable?"

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Rebecca stood up, then sat back down. "Whatever you think. You don't have to agree."

What did Vance mean by not having children with him? Over the five years of their marriage, she had approached him countless times, only to be rejected coldly.

Now that Catherine couldn't have children, he came to her?

"I agree," he said, picking up his briefcase. "Of course. Let's go, Mrs. Bradford."

Rebecca gathered her things and left with him. She even brought a change of clothes, worried she wouldn't have time to change after rehab and would show up sweaty to meet Jenny.

"Are you meeting Jenny for dinner tonight?" he asked, noticing the extra outfit.

"Yeah."

"Do you still have rehabilitation this afternoon?"

"Yes."

He frowned slightly. "Do you really need to keep going? It's so hard. Can you handle it?"

“Yes.”

He looked at her, feeling both exasperated and amused. “You’re really stingy with words. If I transfer another million, would you say more?”

“Sure.” She held up two fingers.

He laughed in disbelief, then pulled out his phone to transfer her another million. “Remember, from now on, one word at a time counts as a breach.”

“Alright.”

He stared at her, and she added, “Sure.”

His face cycled through several colors. He grabbed his briefcase and walked ahead. “Let’s go.”

He was surprisingly easy to provoke.

She followed him into the elevator, descending all the way to the basement, where his car was parked. They got into the car as usual. As she settled into the passenger seat, she noticed a new ornament hanging from the rearview mirror—a charm for safe travels.

He noticed her gaze and cleared his throat. “Catherine put that there. Said it would keep me safe on the road.”

She nodded, but he didn’t start driving immediately. Instead, he observed her for a while to make sure she wasn’t angry.

“Shall we go?”

“Mm-hmm.”

He blinked, and she held up two fingers. He took a deep breath. “Fine. The only time you’re agreeable is when money is involved.”

The car headed straight to the law firm, with Vance already making an appointment. Although the lawyer, Grant Manning, had handled various notarizations before, this was indeed a first.

He proceeded with it anyway, given Vance’s financial power and their friendship. He wasn’t sure of the spite between the couple, but he did the work anyway.

When they reached the third clause, he paused because that involved real financial stakes. It was not something to be taken lightly. Besides, he knew about Vance’s past with Catherine.

He turned to Vance for confirmation, and the latter nodded.

Rebecca spoke up. “I know why you’re so confident. The third clause doesn’t actually restrict you. You have a thousand ways to move assets.”

She signed her name on the contract, and Vance took the pen. “Am I that despicable to you?”

She shrugged. “Maybe even more.”

Vance signed the contract, each stroke powerful. “Don’t worry. I won’t deceive you.”

That was true. His betrayals had always been open. 1

He told her not to worry, but that was impossible. She simply no longer cared.

They finished the notarization and left the law firm. Vance offered, “I’ll take you to the clinic.”

She didn’t refuse, and he took her straight to the waiting room of the clinic.

“Need a driver to pick you up after rehab?”

“No, I’m meeting Jenny. I’ll go straight from here.”

“Alright. I’m heading to the office.”

As he walked away, he answered a phone call, forgetting his briefcase on the seat.

She grabbed her bag and hurried after him.

On the phone, Grant asked, “Are you sure you’re not just playing along with your wife? I’m not part of your game, am I?”

“Yes and no. If she wants to play, I’ll play along,” Vance replied casually.

“You know, this document is a bit ridiculous. I can’t guarantee there won’t be issues later,” Grant said. “I don’t want to deal with any fallout.”

“Don’t worry,” Vance chuckled. “I’ve got this”

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Mutters would be properly disputes down the time warned Farant

“There won’t be Vance replied, alanding by los sal

Are you planning to hide you asta?”

Thave me plans textesal anything We’ve known each other bar se many years for you nnd understand. what kind of perman I am I went dessive her Whether it’s properly or money, they are just malena things Favs het en much, I derailed her dancer dream It’s prissless Be amount of money anyt

“If she wants maney. Ell give it to her Whatever she gala for F’ll provide it she is my wife, after all Ay wealth in shared Yaris a lawyer Why are you even asking?”

“Well, what about your first love?”

Her* We met when we were both struggling she who values loyalty deeply”

Alright” Grant gave up 1 laps it goes the way you want. As for love and all that I’ve seen too much in may line of work”

Vance ended the wall, about to get into his ear, when he remembered he hadn’t taken his briefcase ite noned around and saw Heheers standing right behind him, holding it with a dazed expression

“What’s wrong?” he asked the snapped out of it “Nothing Here is your bag”

she handed it over, and he smiled, “Five words. That’s progress.”

She fell silent, but he didn’t dwell on it. “I’m heading to the office now. Got some urgent matters to handle

Tie took the bag and sped off She watched the car disappear, feeling an unexpected emptiness

After the therapy sweetstone, she had a simple lunch, then returned to wait for rehab

The room had a bed for resting At two o’clock, she began her training with the nurse’s help. Compared yesterday, her muscles hurt less

It was still exhausting, but she finished the full set. Afterward, she took a shower and changed into the clothes she had brought

Then she called the delivery service to send her dirty clothes home before going off to meet Jenny, who had just flown in that day

Years apart, Jenny had fanned a bit from working on construction sites, but she looked healthy and full of energy. It was a sharp contrast to Rebecca's pale, tired appearance.

"Look at these arms!" Jenny flexed her triceps and biceps. "This is what moving bricks does to you."

Rebecca laughed at her enthusiasm.

As they ate and chatted, Jenny suddenly looked a bit awkward. "I have to tell you something. Just don't be upset."

"What is it?"

"I was so excited about having dinner with you that I mentioned it to a few classmates last night. They all wanted to see you, begging to join us for dinner. I said no, worried you might not want that. Then they suggested karaoke after. I told them I'd ask you first. So, would you be okay meeting them?"

"Sure. I've missed everyone. Do they know about my leg?"

"That's the part I need to apologize for. I told them without asking you first."

Jenny looked remorseful, but Rebecca understood. After so long apart, it was natural for her classmates to inquire about her life. Besides, her injury was a fact she couldn't hide.

"It's okay," she replied with a smile.

She needed to step out of the small world Vance had confined her to and embrace a broader horizon, which meant facing all kinds of scrutiny.

"Great! I'll let them know!" Jenny cheered.

Their classmates had already picked a place. If Rebecca agreed, they would head over immediately. If she declined, they would cancel the reservation.

"Let's go!" Jenny said excitedly. "They're on their way."

The venue was nearby. When they arrived, the group was already there. The warmth of their welcome exceeded Rebecca's expectations. They were genuinely thrilled to see her.

They asked about her leg with open concern and no judgment. It felt like any other injury—nothing to tiptoe around. She loved the atmosphere. It was far better than careful avoidance.

They treated her as a normal person who had simply injured a leg, and it turned out to be a delightful evening. They sang the old songs from high school, belting them out for three or four hours.

When they finally sat down, the conversation turned to the past, to regrets, to the different paths everyone had taken. They drank a little, and under their encouragement, Rebecca drank more than she intended.

Some classmates had done well, and others had struggled. As they reminisced, the mood grew reflective.