Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 151

“If I’d known things would turn out like this, I would have studied much harder in high school and skipped far fewer classes,” someone lamented.

“If I’d realized he liked me back then, I wouldn’t have chickened out on graduation day. I would have confessed my feelings, no matter what. I can’t believe I let that chance slip away,” another sighed.

“If I could start over, I would never allow myself to be dependent on anyone else,” Jenny remarked.

The effects of alcohol loosened everyone’s tongues, stirring their most sentimental nerves. For a moment, there were glistening eyes around the room as they transitioned from youthful days to the brink of adulthood, each carrying their own regrets.

“Rebecca, what about you? What is your deepest regret? If you could turn back the clock, what would you do differently?” someone asked.

Rebecca held a glass of wine, the liquid shimmering in the light. Her thoughts wandered back to Halloween when the osmanthus flowers had sparkled like scattered stars.

She managed a faint, wistful smile. “If I could start over...”

Suddenly, the door to the private room swung open, revealing Vance standing in the doorway.

“If I could start over,” she continued, “I would eat all the pumpkin pies by myself. I wouldn’t share them with anyone.”

The alcohol amplified the bittersweet ache swelling in her chest until it pressed against her ribs and made every breath a struggle.

She took a deep breath and looked up to see Vance standing in the dim light.

Her classmates chuckled at her whimsical wish. “What kind of pumpkin pie was it that tasted so amazing? Spill the details and make us drool.”

“Was it from some old family shop? Is it closed now?”

They assumed it was a rare treat from a bygone bakery, forever lost to time.

Rebecca's gaze locked on Vance. Tears started to well up, hot and blurry. "It's not from any famous brand; it was homemade when I was younger."

Her classmates nodded empathetically and launched into their own complaints.

"That's true. Pumpkin pies these days come in all sorts of fancy flavors, but nothing beats the simple ones of the past."

"Totally! I love old-fashioned pumpkin pies."

"Hey, Vance!" Someone spotted him. "Come on in! You are late, buddy."

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The person beside Rebecca quickly vacated the seat. She was already tipsy, Vance's figure doubling in her hazy sight. As he approached, she instinctively tugged at her classmate's sleeve, but her grip missed.

Vance settled firmly beside her. Right then, a guy named Obadiah Mendez lined up three glasses in front of him. "You are late, Vance. The penalty is three shots to start!"

"Sorry, man," Vance replied, draping an arm around Rebecca's shoulders and gazing down at her. "I am here to pick up my wife. I cannot drink because I have to drive."

"Just call a rideshare," Obadiah advised.

"That won't work," Vance chuckled. "Look at her. You all got her plastered. If I join in, who is going to look after her?"

Rebecca was indeed a bit drunk, but she was aware of everything happening around her. However, with the alcohol coursing through her, her reactions were more unfiltered.

Her first impulse was to shove him aside. She muttered, "I don't need you to take care of me. Go away."

It was pure, instinctive rejection.

"You are really drunk. Let's go home," Vance said, attempting to lift her.

She squirmed in his grasp. "I'm not going anywhere! I don't want to go home!"

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“Did you hear that? She doesn’t want to go home!” Obadiah shoved Vance’s shoulder.

Vance was halfway to standing with Rebecca in his arms when he was jostled back onto the couch.

Jenny sensed the tension in the air, knowing Obadiah had drunk quite a bit. Worried that he’d act recklessly under the influence, she interjected, “Alright, it is getting late. We had a great time. Let’s wrap this up and head out.”

“No way!” Obadiah protested, clamping down on Vance’s shoulder with unyielding force. “Nobody leaves until we have finished this bottle!”

Vance was honed by years in the cutthroat world of business, so he picked up on the undercurrents immediately. If Jenny could sense it, how could he not?

His face hardened. “Obadiah, I will overlook this because you are wasted, but pull yourself together. Do not make a scene.”

“A scene? Pull myself together?” Obadiah’s eyes blazed with barely contained fury. “You are the one who needs to check yourself!”

He seized Vance’s collar, and Vance clamped down on his wrist in return. “Are you looking for trouble?”

“Damn right!” Obadiah bellowed, raising his voice. “Tell us! What have you done to Rebecca?”

Vance’s gaze sharpened like a blade. His grip tightened until veins bulged on his hand. “She is living the good life with fine food, luxury clothes, and a mansion. I treat her like royalty. Why do you care?”

“Oh yeah?” Obadiah sneered, hauling Vance up from the couch. “Then explain why she is like this now? What happened to her leg? She used to dance like a swan. What did you do to her? Have you really been taking care of her? How does a happy marriage turn her into this? You have given five years of excuses, saying she hates socializing. You are full of it! Are you abusing her at home?”

“We are fine!” Vance shot back. “Her leg is her private matter, and no explanation is owed to you. Know your place, Obadiah! Don’t try to play any tricks!”

At a fierce yank, Vance’s collar buttons popped off, and Obadiah staggered back.

Having consumed too much alcohol, Obadiah lost his balance and crashed into the coffee table. Bottles and plates scattered in a chaotic clatter.

“Bastard! You’re asking for it!” He scrambled up and lunged.

The others rushed in and pinned him down to prevent a brawl. “Vance, get Rebecca out of here! He is hammered, but you are sober. Do not let this blow up!”

Vance straightened his collar and shot Obadiah a frigid glare before wrapping an arm around Rebecca’s waist and hoisting her up. “Come on, honey. We are leaving. Skip these reunions from now on.”

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Rebecca was half-dragged and half-carried out. Her feet barely touched the ground.

“Why can’t she attend class reunions?” Obadiah yelled after him. “What are you hiding?”

Vance halted. “Nothing. But you had better not be the one with secrets.”

“Me? About what?” Obadiah scoffed. “I am an open book! But I still want answers from you. Those love letters I slipped into her desk back in the day... did you toss them all?”

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Chapter 153

Love Letters? Rebecca had no clue that Obadiah had ever written anything to her.

She glanced back, but Vance scooped her into his arms and strode out of the room without a word. In the private room, stunned silence hung in the air as classmates exchanged wide-eyed looks.

What? Obadiah had a crush on Rebecca?

Obadiah thrashed against the guys restraining him. “Let me go! I am going to smash that hypocrite!”

“Obadiah, you are plastered. Chill out,” they urged, gripping tighter to stop him from bolting after Vance.

“How did Vance even get here? Who invited him?” someone asked.

“I did,” a guy admitted sheepishly, raising his hand. “He said he was picking up Rebecca. I wish I had not told him our spot.”

“Why not?” Obadiah howled. “I wanted him here! So, I could finally give him a piece of my mind!”

“Obadiah!”

“Do not hold me back! You all know how much Rebecca loved dancing, right? She would dance during morning drills, after classes, and even after evening study. Sometimes, she would flip mid-stride while walking down the hall. Dance was her everything, but now her leg is wrecked. How heartbroken she must be! Vance fed us lies about her avoiding hangouts. He must be keeping something from us!” Obadiah roared. “Where is he? Bring that bastard back here! He needs to answer for me!”

By then, Vance had long since departed with Rebecca. His car waited curbside. He cradled her, unlocked the passenger door, and eased her inside.

As he slid into the driver’s seat, she fumbled for the handle and tried to escape. He locked the doors instantly.

“Unlock it! I want out!” she demanded.

Her head pounded heavier by the second. The alcohol’s grip tightened relentlessly.

“You’re drunk.”

“I’m not!”

She had heard everything clearly, including him calling her honey-a term he had never used before.

He usually referred to her by her full name or, at most, as Mrs. Bradford, typically when he was being sarcastic.

She could sense his bad mood, but that was his normal state. Whatever! She didn’t care.

“It’s hot! Let me out,” she repeated, reaching for the door again.

Chapter thi

The air conditioning had just started, and it wasn’t cool yet. Vance rolled down the window to let in some cool air.

“What did you mean earlier in the private room?” he demanded coldly.

“W-What?” Rebecca blinked.

She was unsure which part he was referring to. She had said plenty that night.

“About your pumpkin pie... What did you mean by not sharing it with anyone?” He rested his hand on the steering wheel and looked straight ahead.

“Mm... Not giving it to Vance.” Her head grew laden, and she closed her eyes slightly.

“Why not?” he pressed.

A memory fragment resurfaced in her mind, and Vance’s past words echoed, “The pumpkin pies you gave me were just a trick to win me over.”

She smiled bitterly, her eyes stinging with unshed tears. “Because I don’t want to chase him anymore. I gave my pumpkin pie to the wrong person.”

“Oh? The wrong person?” He leaned over. “Who were you giving it to, then?”

“To...” Her mind was muddled, but she remembered her earlier statement that she would keep it to herself.

“To Obadiah?” he pressed tightly.

That was when it clicked. Obadiah had mentioned writing her love letters.

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Chapter 154

Rebecca furrowed her brows, her vision swimming. “Why did you throw away those love letters? They were for me.”

“I was the class monitor!” Vance said sternly. “The school bans early dating!”

Rebecca scowled at the excuse, hammering his shoulder. “What did it matter to you? You were just the class monitor, not the homeroom teacher. Those letters were my privacy. Who gave you the right to throw them away?”

She was drunk and unfocused. Her blows lacked sting, but they landed solidly on his shoulder and chest.

“You are that mad?” He caught her hand. “About those tossed love letters?”

“Of course! If someone wrote me love letters...” she mumbled.

Hazy memories of high school flooded back. Early romance was taboo, but who had not felt those teenage flutters?

She had harbored a secret crush on Vance, yet no boy ever pursued her. Jenny and the other girls got gifts and notes, but she got nothing.

She was insecure from a loveless home. Her parents berated her and favored her brother. Everything she did seemed to annoy them, so in her heart, aside from Josette, no one liked her.

She wouldn't be sad over the lack of love letters, but if she did receive one, at least it would have been a form of validation that she was not utterly unlovable.

"What if you got them? Would you date that person?" Vance pressed.

Her frown deepened. When had she implied that?

"Those punks had ulterior motives," he insisted. "Jenny's boyfriend? They were childhood sweethearts, sure, but I caught him with other girls countless times. You girls were naïve. Any kindness melted you. You would only get burned."

Rebecca reeled, unable to believe that Jenny's boyfriend was that kind of person.

"But Jenny..." She reached for the car door again.

"Stay put!" Vance pinned her back. "She knows. She doesn't need you meddling in her affairs."

"But..." Rebecca was still worried.

"No buts. She is tough, not fragile like you."

Fragile? Since when?

"Still think Obadiah's letters were genuine?

Her scowl intensified. The booze hit harder, and Vance's face quadrupled. She shook her head to dispel the extras.

"He is not that type."

"Then what type is he? Tell me."

"H-He is kind. If he cares for someone, he'll stick by them."

In fact, she barely knew him. Their high school interactions were sparse, but she recalled him sneaking a scruffy stray dog into the dorm. Years later, she had seen his posts. The dog was now elderly, but it was still pampered under his care.

“Mrs. Bradford!” Vance’s roar teetered on eruption.

“Rebecca...” a voice called from outside the window.

She turned, only to be met by warm pressure sealing her lips.

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Chapter 155

The outside world fell silent.

The car windows were open, and an early summer breeze, carrying a floral fragrance, wafted into the vehicle.

Rebecca felt disoriented, but reality quickly hit her. She started to struggle but was pinned against the seat.

In the cramped space, escaping was nearly impossible. She twisted and dodged, but Vance’s scorching lips pursued relentlessly. Finally, he cupped her head. His breath invaded, dominant and all-consuming.

They had been married for five years, yet this was their first true intimacy. It was her first kiss, but nothing like the tender dreams she had once cherished.

This felt worlds apart. She did not want this.

In her desperation, she seized his hair and yanked backward with all her strength. He grunted in pain and finally released her.

They both gasped for air, locking eyes in the confined passenger seat. She felt dizzy, his face bobbing before her like a mirage.

Outside, her classmates had vanished.

“Can’t I kiss you?” Vance grunted, leaning in again.

Nausea surged. Rebecca shoved him off, flung open the door, and staggered toward a roadside trash bin, heedless of her unsteady gait.

She reached it just in time and retched violently. After she emptied her stomach, she slumped against a nearby tree. The ground tilted wildly, a result of the alcohol's lingering effects.

Without the support of the tree, she would have collapsed.

Vance stormed over, his face thunderous, and gripped her shoulders. "What the hell is this?"

She leaned against the trunk and stared blankly, unable to focus.

Rage flickered in his eyes. "Is it that bad? I am your husband! You vomit over a kiss?"

Her surroundings whirled. A buzzing noise filled her mind, annoying and persistent. As a result, his words didn't register.

She swatted at it, only to slap Vance's face instead. He paused, momentarily stunned, before scooping her up and tossing her back into the car.

The engine revved, and the radio kicked on, playing the poignant "Butterfly Lovers" segment.

Rebecca was enthralled. It was one of the classic dance pieces she had performed in college. The dance moves had become part of her muscle memory, ingrained in her very being.

Her eyes were glazed, but she began to hum along, her hands instinctively moving with rhythm.

He glanced over silently and accelerated. The song ended, and the host chattered.

Rebecca frowned. "Music! Don't stop! Replay it!"

The station had moved on, and she kept clamoring for more. Vance sighed, pulled out his phone, found the song, and queued it via Bluetooth.

Finally, her raucous demands quieted down. She resumed humming and gestured as he looped the song and drove them home.

She was drunk beyond measure, so he carried her inside. As he set her down, she flipped onto his shoulder and nearly fell off.

Luckily, he held on tightly.

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Chapter 156

Rebecca scowled. “Hey! Your lift is weak! There is no power. Did you skip dinner?”

Vance was speechless. Was this a rehearsal? Was he her partner in a show?

“We’re home. Let’s get inside,” he said.

“Practicing like this, and you want to go back? No way! Do it again! Get the music on! Why did it stop?” she protested.

“Class is dismissed!” He humored her, carrying her into the elevator.

“Practice continues after class! Back to the studio!” She writhed.

He held firm. “Okay, okay, we’ll go back. We’re almost there.”

The elevator shot straight up and stopped at their floor. He carried her straight to the bathroom for a wash and teeth-brushing.

Her clothes were clean, but he still wanted to get her changed, give her a full bath, and help her rest.

Just as he started to take off her clothes, she began to struggle. “No change. More practice.”

She paused, and a name leaped into her mind. “Desmond, your lifts lack strength. No rest. Let’s practice more!”

Vancy’s fury was instantly ignited. “Who are you calling?”

She shook her foggy head. “Desmond! The lead is out. You are the understudy. Step up and practice!”

Vance held the back of her head firmly, his voice sharp. “Look at me! Who am I?”

She blinked at spinning ceilings and shadows. “Not Desmond? Then who are you?”

“I’m Vance!”

“Vance? What is he doing at our school? Go away!”

His eyes narrowed. “Is it bad that he visits? Why chase him off?”

“Ugh. Do not let him disrupt rehearsal!” She waved impatiently. “Desmond, kick him out. More practice!”

His expression soured further. “Kick him out?”

Drunkenly, she nodded. “Yes! Out! I do not want to see him!”

His grip tightened on her shoulder. “Why?”

“I-I hate him,” she replied, tearing up. “I hate him so much. I can’t stand the sight.”

His eyes dimmed. “Do you hate him that much?”

“Yes!” She clutched his shirt. “Get rid of him. I want to dance. Don’t let him ruin it.”

He stared at her, unsure of what to say.

“Desmond?”

“Yeah, I’m here.”

“Let’s dance. Music on.”

Vance restarted Butterfly Lovers without letting go. If he did, she would fall to the floor.

“Come on! Keep up!” Rebecca laughed, dancing to the music.

Her leg was impaired, so her steps faltered. She limped yet danced joyfully. Her eyes were sparkling, a stark contrast to her usual reserve. 2

“Rebecca,” he whispered.

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Chapter 157

“Hmm?” Rebecca was still lost in the music.

“You’re so glowing when you dance,” Vance said, captivated by her radiant smile.

“Of course!” she laughed, teetering in his support. “Desmond, do you know my happiest days?”

His heart tightened. “When?”

“Those four years at the dance academy. I flew freely.” She twirled, feeling dizzy until she collapsed into his arms. “I had dance and you...”

She meant friends, but drunkenness truncated it. Her head rested on his chest, and silence feil.

Vance froze until Nancy brought the pajamas per his request. She hovered at the door, hearing no sounds from within.

“Sir?” she called out tentatively.

Vance roused and shook Rebecca. “Rebecca, wake up.

“Stop...” she murmured. “I’m tired. I need to rest.”

He stiffened, turning to the door. “Nancy, you still there?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Come in.”

“Okay.”

Nancy entered with the pajamas, saw Rebecca cradled in Vance’s arms, and quickly looked away.

“Run a bath for her,” he ordered just as his phone rang.

The screen flashed with Aiden’s name.

“Hello?” he answered, still holding Rebecca.

“Vance, come join us! We’re all here,” Aiden urged.

Vance looked at Rebecca, who seemed to have dozed off. Her cheeks were flushed with drunkenness.

“On my way.” He handed Rebecca to Nancy. “She’s drunk. Take care of her.”

Upset about their prior clash, Nancy ventured, “Sir, are you leaving while she is like this?”

“Or what?” he replied coldly. “What’s your job?”

Nancy hushed and secured Rebecca.

Vance left the house and drove toward the location Aiden had sent him. Half an hour later, he arrived at a club where Aiden and the others were having fun.

As he entered the private room, the music was blaring. Aiden and Lucas were in the middle of a duet. Catherine bounced over to him, grinning widely. “Look at them, singing so happily!”

Vance smiled back.

Aiden paused, passing the mic. “What’s wrong with us singing? Here, your turn.”

Lucas followed suit, offering his mic to Vance. “You guys take over. Feels off singing with Aiden.”

It was an old song playing. When Vance took the microphone, the lyrics were just reaching: “I will love you until the end of time.”

He missed the cue. Catherine jumped in and nudged him.

He focused on the screen and sang along: “I will accompany you until the seas run dry and rocks crumble. Even if we go back to the past, this is still my only choice.”

He trailed off, and Catherine finished the last part: “You chose me; it was our choice.”

“Vance!” Her eyes sparkled. “I hope you will love me until the end of time. I hope you will accompany me to the ends of the earth. Your turn!”

“Oh,” Vance chuckled. “I zoned out. Sorry.”

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Vance looked at the lyrics on the screen, singing, “Even if everything restarts, I won’t change my decision. I choose you.”

Catherine sang along: “I choose you, oh... I will definitely love you...”

Vance’s phone buzzed on the table, but the loud music drowned it out. Nearby, Aiden saw Nancy’s name flashing on the screen. He glanced at Vance, who was lost in the song, and pressed the answer button.

The music was too loud, so he didn’t turn on his speakerphone. Snippets about Rebecca reached his ears, irking him.

Was Rebecca spying again? It was infuriating. Without a word, he set the phone back on the table and let the music flood through.

“I will love you until the end of time. I will always be with you...”

Nancy’s dropped phone blared the duet. Vance’s voice was unmistakable. She scrambled to turn it off, nearly crawling to do so.

Her eyes glistened as she turned to see Rebecca wrapped in a bath towel. The latter had heard it all.

“I’m so sorry, Madam. I’m useless,” Nancy choked, guilt-stricken.

Vance had ditched Rebecca to have fun with his mistress. It was heartbreaking.

Nancy blamed herself for slipping earlier, which had sent both Rebecca and her crashing to the floor. She sprained her ankle in the fall, but that didn’t matter.

She couldn’t let Rebecca lie on the bathroom floor all night, so she had called Vance, hoping to bring him back. But in her panic, she had dropped the phone and accidentally hit the speakerphone button.

Rebecca shook her head, knowing it wasn’t the time to care about love songs. “I don’t know where my phone is. Use yours to call an ambulance and property management.”

She tried rising for clothes, but dizziness got the better of her.

Earlier, she had dozed off in the tub. Nancy’s pull had jolted her awake.

Now her feet were still unsteady. As she gripped the tub for support, she lost her balance and fell back down.

“Madam, don’t move!” Nancy cried.

Rebecca blinked, turning around to find Nancy’s hands covered in blood. Nancy’s voice trembled.” Madam, you’re bleeding. Please don’t move.”

Rebecca looked down and realized her towel had slipped. Blood was seeping through.

The fall brought a sharp pain to the back of her head. She reached back and felt wet. Bringing her hand

ChapteEB back into view, she saw it was stained with blood.

“Madam!” Nancy gasped.

Rebecca remained calm despite the haze. “Request a female guard from management.”

“Okay.” Nancy grabbed her phone.

The screen still displayed the call record, and her heart ached for Rebecca once again.

In the private room, Aiden ended the call and eyed the duo. Her finger swiped across the screen, deleting the log, and she smiled smugly.

Thankfully, Catherine knew Vance’s phone password and had shared it with him. Otherwise, he wouldn’t have been able to do this.

Vance deserved happiness. Over the years, he and Catherine had both suffered too much.

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Chapter 159

Nancy’s ankle was severely swollen, making it impossible for her to walk, and she had fractured her arm, which explained why she couldn’t hold her phone steadily.

Rebecca had a head injury that required stitches, but aside from feeling a bit dizzy, likely due to blood loss and alcohol, she was fine.

She was worried the stitches couldn’t handle the long flight, and the doctor didn’t give her a definitive answer at first.

He inquired about her flight schedule. It was around ten days until her departure. The wound wasn’t severe, so he said they would assess her healing closer to the date.

Rebecca and Nancy were in different rooms, with no one caring for them. When nurses asked, Rebecca requested caregivers promptly.

She was dizzy but organized. After taking care of everything, she felt exhausted and lay down to sleep.

The ward bustled with noises that were usually disruptive. Not this time. She slumbered soundly.

Nancy fretted and dispatched the caregivers to check on Rebecca. Each time they returned with the same report: she was still asleep.

The doctors reassured Nancy that everything was fine, but she puzzled over Rebecca’s prolonged sleep.

What troubled her even more was that Vance hadn't called once.

Even if Rebecca was sleeping too deeply to hear the phone, her own phone hadn't rung at all. She had tried calling him, which should signify something important, yet he hadn't called back.

The call came the next afternoon. Rebecca had just woken up, having missed both breakfast and lunch.

Groggily, she heard her phone ringing from the drawer and asked the caregiver to fetch it. The screen displayed Vance's name.

She hesitated for a moment before answering. His voice then came through.

"Rebecca?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have a gathering this afternoon, so I'll be home a bit late."

This was strange. He had never called to inform her of late returns before. Why now?

Groggy and tired, she replied curtly, "Okay."

He paused, as if having something more to say.

"So..."

"Rebecca?"

She waited for him to continue.

"Um, I got drunk last night and stayed at a hotel."

Her mind cleared a bit. So, he hadn't come home last night, and it seemed unlikely he would return today either. Not returning home for two consecutive nights was rare, especially since he was not on a business trip.

"Oh," she hummed, not having the energy to engage with him. "I'm going to hang up now. I'm hungry."

Having slept for nearly a day and night, she felt famished. Her stomach was upset from the alcohol last night.

"Okay." Vance's voice softened. "I'll bring food home. What would you like?"

“Anything is fine,” she responded indifferently.

She wasn’t home anyway, so what was the point of him bringing her food?

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Chapter 160

The caregiver waited patiently by the side, ready to assist Rebecca in washing up, using the bathroom, and dining.

Rebecca craved warm soup, but she asked about Nancy’s situation first. Once learning Nancy was fine, she asked, “Could you pick up the takeout for me later?”

She ordered soup and dishes from a favored restaurant, then browsed social media.

One post caught her eye. Jenny had shared a throwback photo of their high school days alongside a recent picture of them from last night’s dinner, captioned: [Nine years ago versus now.]

Rebecca smiled at the contrast. Back then, she looked so innocent and naïve.

The post was fresh, with no comments yet. After liking it, she continued scrolling until she stumbled upon Aiden’s post.

It read: [Across the stretch of time, I wish you guys happiness.]

Beneath the text was a video. She opened to hear a familiar melody.

“I will love you until the end of time...”

It was amusing to see how he had used social media to express best wishes for the pair.

Last night, Rebecca had been too drunk to remember everything. Today, after a long sleep, her memory became crystal clear.

Vance had joined them for karaoke, singing “Choices” with Catherine just as she and Nancy had taken a tumble.

But she wasn’t surprised. Given how close they were, singing love songs together was perfectly normal.

She blocked Aiden, thought for a moment, and decided to block the entire group. Out of sight, out of mind.

In the past five years, they had shared nothing but frustration. There had been no real connections.

From last night until now, she had been through injury, self-rescue, hospitalization, and treatment. Only Nancy was there for her.

They all thought she couldn't survive without Vance, yet throughout the whole ordeal, she had never once pleaded for help. She had managed to get herself to the hospital.

40 minutes later, the takeout arrived. She divided the food into two portions, asking the caregiver to take one to Nancy. Then she invited the caregiver to join her for dinner.

The warm soup soothed her, and she finally relaxed.

She had overslept, so she felt remarkably awake after dinner. Another day had passed, leaving only ten days until her departure.

She was still concerned about how her injury might affect her travel plans. So, she sent a message to Lauren.

Lauren: [Are you hurt? Is it serious?]

Rebecca: [Just a small wound, but I had a few stitches. I'm concerned I might not be able to board the plane.]

Lauren: [If not, we will leave first, and you can catch up in five to seven days. We can reschedule your flight then.]

Rebecca pondered this solution and thanked Lauren for her understanding. Just as she finished the conversation, a call from Vance came through.

She hesitated, uncertain of his intention. She was sure, though, it couldn't be anything pleasant.

She let it ring, and almost instantly, a text arrived: [Why did you block me?]

She ignored the message and set her phone down. She hadn't blocked his number because there were still many matters to discuss-assets, case withdrawal, and divorce.

But she didn't want to see posts related to him or his circle, nor did she wish to engage in their lives anymore.

Dusk deepened outside. She thought another day had slipped away just like that, but then a visitor arrived.