

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 161

It was Desmond.

Rebecca stared in surprise. She had not expected to see him at all. “How did you know I was here?”

He smiled, and she immediately understood. Lauren must have told him.

“I’m here on behalf of the entire tour troupe to check on you,” Desmond said with a warm grin. “I’ve been given quite an important mission.”

Rebecca laughed, her spirits lifting. She didn’t know every member of the troupe well, yet they had all shown her genuine kindness.

“How did you end up hitting your head?” he asked, eyeing the thick bandage wrapped around her skull.

“The bathroom floor was too slippery,” she replied lightly. “I wasn’t paying attention.”

She had no desire to explain the messy details of her family drama. They were nothing to be proud of.

Desmond brought her some fruit. The early summer strawberries looked vibrant and tempting.

They sat together, popping the juicy fruit while they talked about the European tour, moving easily from the repertoire to every detail of the itinerary.

Rebecca’s eyes sparkled with pure longing as she listened. That was the life she had dreamed of for so long. She could no longer dance, but simply returning to that world and being part of the group again would fill her with uncontainable joy.

That was where she truly belonged.

When Vance reached the hospital room, the door stood half-open. Through the gap, he first noticed the bright light in Rebecca’s eyes. Then he realized those lively, shining eyes were fixed on Desmond.

He lingered in the doorway, but Rebecca never noticed him. She kept chatting with Desmond, gesturing animatedly and laughing freely.

Vance's face darkened. He pushed the door open and strode inside, stopping beside her bed.

Rebecca frowned, wondering what had brought him there. Then it clicked that he must have called Nancy when she ignored his calls.

He carried a paper bag stamped with the logo of an outrageously expensive Western restaurant. Without a word, he set it on the nightstand, but his arrival instantly drained the warmth from the room.

The air grew heavy, and Desmond fell silent, unsure what to say. An awkward tension settled over everything, but Rebecca barely glanced at Vance.

Instead, she turned back to Desmond with an easy smile that cut through the discomfort. "Anyway, where were we? How did you finally break that bad habit with your instep?"

Chapter let

"Oh, right." Desmond picked up the conversation smoothly and began sharing stories from his own dance training.

Every hurdle he described resonated deeply with her.

"Oh my God! Me too!"

"Yeah, that hurt like hell!"

"Exactly! I used to cry in secret because the teacher was so strict and intimidating. But later, I was so grateful. Those rigorous years shaped us into who we are today."

"Totally, and cravings were the worst part."

For every point Desmond made, Rebecca chimed in with heartfelt agreement.

They had both started dancing as children and had endured the same hardships, the same tears, as well as the same hard-won glory and applause.

They spoke the same language, and Vance did not.

He understood none of it. The specialized terms like double jeté, assemblé, pirouette, and tour en l'air were completely foreign to him.

The two of them grew more animated. Rebecca even pounded the mattress in delight. "Yes! When I was controlling my weight, I got so hungry I wanted to gnaw on the bed frame!"

Vance's expression grew stormier by the second, yet they showed no sign of stopping. Finally, he cut in, his voice cold. "Mr. Schroeder, this is a hospital. Kindly remember to be quiet."

Rebecca's brows drew together. How rude could this man be?

"Come on!" Her tone sharpened. "It was me who got carried away chatting."

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 162

Vance shot her a sullen look. "Mr. Schroeder, hospitals have visiting hours, right? The patient needs rest now, so..."

His message was clear. He wanted Desmond to leave.

Desmond felt a flash of embarrassment. He truly disliked this man. In any other setting, he might have pushed back.

But this was a hospital. Rebecca was injured, and no matter what, Vance was still her husband.

For her sake, he swallowed his irritation and got up. "I'll head out. Rest well, Rebecca. I'll visit again soon."

"Sorry about this," she muttered, still angry at Vance's rudeness.

"No worries at all. Heal up. Catch you later." He winked-the private signal for "see you with the troupe."

Once Desmond was gone, Vance stared at her. "What was that code? Catch you later? Where exactly are you two planning to meet? Don't forget who you are, Mrs. Bradford!"

She pulled up the blanket. "Hospitals have visiting hours. The patient needs rest. You should leave."

"You're kicking me out?" He pointed at the door. "You defend that kid and shove me aside. What do you mean?"

"Literal meaning." She leaned back against the headboard. "See yourself out."

Anger flared across his face. He glanced at the uneasy caregiver nearby. "Who are you?"

“The caregiver,” the woman stammered.

“So, you hired proper help,” he sneered. “Please give us the room.”

The caregiver looked at Rebecca, who gave no objection. It dawned on her that the man was Rebecca’s husband and that they were having a spat.

She slipped out but stayed close, ready to go back anytime if Rebecca needed her.

Vance sat on the edge of the bed and leaned over. His hands braced on either side of Rebecca’s body.

“Why did you block me?” he demanded.

She thought for a second. “The subsequent issues require minimal contact. You settle the contract and cash out those items. Then I’ll drop the case. The rest can be sorted over the phone. There’s no need to stay connected on social media. I don’t want to scroll my feed and run into something disgusting that ruins my mood.”

“Disgusting? Who exactly are you calling disgusting?” he demanded.

She arched a brow. Whoever reacted first was the one who fit. 1

“Damn it!” He grew agitated, cursing openly. “I’ve never posted anything on social media in my life! How am I ruining your feed?”

She gave a sarcastic hum. Posting and deleting it didn’t count? That was funny.

He stared at her, then suddenly leaned in and kissed her hard. She was caught off guard, unable to believe he’d do that to a patient.

Her head injury still throbbed. “Are you out of your mind?”

“If I’m disgusting, what does that make you?” he snorted. “The one who eats it?”

Her stomach, still unsettled from last night’s drinking, churned at his words. She leaned over the bed’s edge, fighting the urge to vomit.

He kicked the trash can closer. “Why do you puke every single time I kiss you?”

Nothing came up, but her patience snapped.

She lifted her head and fired back, “We’ve been married for years. Haven’t you been moaning Catherine’s name every time you take care of yourself? Can’t I be sick of that?” 4

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 163

Vance froze, his eyes widening in shock. Rebecca watched him calmly, her expression serene.

After a long, stiff pause, he got his voice back. "How did you..."

"You're not the only smart one in the world," she interrupted, looking straight ahead. "I didn't say it, but that doesn't mean I didn't know."

"I..." He sat in front of her, fumbling for words.

She waited, but no explanation came. He had never been the type to lie to her face. That was either his virtue or his flaw.

Right now, it left him with nothing to say, but Rebecca would not wait forever.

"Leave or stay," she said. "It's your choice. But if you stay, you can't meet Catherine again."

He met her eyes, his inner conflict clear on his face. She held his gaze and spoke firmly. "I'm serious."

Silence stretched on, and he finally turned to leave-an outcome she had expected. She had only been testing the waters on a whim.

Now that he was gone, she felt strangely at peace. When one's expectations of someone or something hit zero, disappointment didn't even factor in.

The caregiver returned, looking flustered. She had been right outside and had heard every word. They hadn't bothered to lower their voices, and overhearing such private matters left her awkward.

Rebecca, however, felt perfectly at ease. "Could you help me? I'd like to take a shower."

Having a task eased the caregiver's discomfort at once. She quickly agreed and assisted Rebecca.

After the shower, Rebecca returned to bed and found a new text.

Vance: [I'm sorry. I can't cut Cathy out of my life. But I wouldn't let you down either. It's a promise, and I won't go back on it.]

She tossed the phone aside in disgust.

“Ma’am, what about this?” the caregiver asked while tidying the nightstand. “Do you want to eat it?”

“No.”

“Well, this might melt soon.”

The caregiver peeked inside, saw cranberries, and showed it to her.

Rebecca recognized the signature dessert from a popular restaurant. It was a cranberry mud ball filled with ice cream, whipped cream, and mixed berries.

It was pleasantly tart. Throwing it away would be a waste.

Chooter 163.

“Bring it here,” she decided.

Vance returned to the restaurant. Catherine was surprised. “Back so soon? How is Rebecca?”

“She slipped and hit her head. Nothing serious.” He sat down, his mood dark.

Catherine studied his face. “What’s wrong? You look upset. Did you fight with her?”

He didn’t answer, simply downed the wine in front of him.

“You took the wrong glass. That’s mine.” She pointed out.

Aiden waved it off. “No fuss. You guys are basically one.”

“Did you guys really fight?” Catherine probed again. “She’s injured. You should be by her side.”

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 164

“It’s fine,” Vance said. “She has a caregiver.”

“Come on.” Catherine looked worried. “A caregiver can’t compare with you. She needs you right now. We can drink any day.”

“Let it go, Cathy.” Aiden patted Vance’s shoulder. “I know Rebecca. She probably kicked Vance out. If she had even half your understanding, Vance wouldn’t have such a hard time.”

“That’s right,” Lucas chimed in. “You’re too reasonable. Should fight for what’s yours. She is after the money and Vance’s attention. You? You keep pushing him toward her.”

Mention of the money ignited fresh fury in Catherine. She had finally gained some of Vance’s wealth, only for Rebecca to claw every bit of it back. She had already moved out of that beautifully decorated house into a hotel, and all those designer bags, jewelry, and watches had to be returned.

Rebecca was ruining her life. Yet she could not let the anger show. She had to remain the gentle, understanding one.

The rims of her eyes reddened. “Don’t say that. Vance works so hard for all of us, including Rebecca. If we can’t give him peace, who will?”

The words struck Vance deeply. Since his grandmother died in high school, no one had truly been there for him.

“Even so, you don’t have to be so generous,” Aiden sighed. “She demands everything back, and you just hand it over. It breaks my heart. She never does anything for him. You’re the one always thinking of Vance.”

“It’s what friends do,” she smiled softly. “Let her have the house and the luxuries. I don’t care. What matters to me is our friendship. I hope that at 50, 60, and even 80, we can still sit together drinking and chatting just like this.”

Vance’s eyes glistened. He gave her a gentle smile. “Don’t worry. Once she drops the case, I’ll take care of everything.”

“See?” Aiden grinned. “I told you he wouldn’t abandon you. Believe me now?”

Catherine’s heart leaped with hope, but she kept her expression worried. “Will Rebecca be angry?”

“Forget her. I’ll smooth it over with more cash.” Vance paused, then laughed, “She’s grown used to the best-private rooms, top caregivers, and business class. Without me, she wouldn’t know how to live.”

“I was just worried you two would fight,” Catherine said with a coy smile, while inside she seethed.

Why give Rebecca more cash? Why give her the best? Why not divorce her already? Only then could everything be Catherine’s.

Rebecca had the good life for five years while Catherine suffered abroad. It was unfair and infuriating.

Those things were supposed to be hers.

Lucas raised his glass. “Cheers! To us at 80! Still kicking back like this, drinking and chatting!”

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 165

“Cheers!” Vance lifted his glass and clinked it firmly with the others. “To our friendship. You’ll always be my best buddies!”

Rebecca stayed in the hospital for four days. On the fourth day, her wound had healed well. The doctor removed the stitches and cleared her for discharge.

Josette called with wonderful news: a package had arrived at the house, and from the label, it was clearly Rebecca’s passport.

“Great!” Rebecca’s voice brightened. “I’m coming right away.”

Her head had healed enough for normal movement, but Nancy still needed a few more days in the hospital. She told Nancy not to worry and said she would stay with Josette.

After handling the discharge, she stopped by the clinic. It had been days since her last therapy and rehab session, and she would not be able to continue for a while.

She explained the situation to the doctor and mentioned she might be traveling in about a week, making regular treatment impossible.

“You’ve been progressing, actually,” Edwin said with regret. “Rehab is a long haul. Takes a year, two, and even three or five. No one recovers in days. I can’t promise full recovery, but quitting now means zero chance.”

“I know, but...” She paused, weighing the two paths.

A slim hope of walking normally versus a hundred-percent chance at a new life. The decision came quickly. “I have to pause for now.”

“I truly hate to see potential wasted. We’ve had patients achieve complete recovery, and your early progress was even better than theirs. As a doctor, I can’t bear to watch you stop,” Edwin sighed, shaking his head. “Here’s what we’ll do: you already have the rehab videos. I’ll send you the full therapy techniques and theory. If you find a skilled

practitioner, ask them to follow our method. For rehab, it carries risk, but with your dance background, you might find an experienced trainer. Always have protection during exercises.”

Though she held little hope for full recovery of her leg, his genuine concern warmed her. She asked, “Is it all right to share your techniques? You don’t mind?”

“A doctor’s duty is to heal and save lives. We should learn from one another,” he said, typing on his keyboard. “We give lectures across the country. This method isn’t ours alone.”

“Thank you,” she said sincerely, leaving the office.

She was over the moon, thinking about heading to Josette’s place and finally seeing her passport. But as she reached the waiting area, she spotted Catherine sitting there, probably for a follow-up.

She quickly slipped back into Edwin’s office and asked him not to mention their earlier conversation to

Vance. The doctor looked puzzled but agreed.

When she returned to the waiting area, Vance had just stepped out. “Cathy, it’s your turn. Come on.”

The words had barely left his mouth when Rebecca appeared in his line of sight.

Comments apport

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 166

Vance’s expression shifted.

Rebecca offered a bright, casual smile. “Hello, Mr. Bradford.”

“What are you doing here? You’re discharged?” His tone made it clear he was anything but pleased.

She kept her smile. “Yeah. Nice running into you.”

His face darkened further. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

She shrugged. “Didn’t want to bother you. Well, I’ll get out of your hair.”

“Hold on,” he called out.

She raised an eyebrow. “What? You suddenly have time to drive me home?”

“Wait for a while. We’ll go together.”

“No need, honey. We’re not headed to the same destination.”

In six days, they would part ways for good.

His scowl deepened. “Where are you going?”

“Easy, Vance.” Catherine jumped in, looking nervously at Rebecca. “Don’t be mad, Rebecca. He’s only here accompanying me for my follow-up. The last treatment helped a lot, so we’re getting another prescription.” ¹

“Cathy’s parents aren’t in Soliaridge,” Vance explained. “She’s here alone, and I’m her closest friend. Who else would come with her?” ¹

Rebecca nodded. “Of course. Carry on, then. Hope you two have a baby soon.”

Vance’s brows snapped together. “What kind of nonsense is that?”

“What? Is it wrong to wish Catherine a baby?” she scoffed. “Should I wish you infertility instead?”

Vance’s anger simmered beneath the surface. Catherine patted his chest soothingly. “Chill, Vance. Rebecca didn’t mean it. Actually, since you two haven’t had children yet, maybe she should get checked, too.”

Turning to Rebecca, she added, “Why not join me? You and Vance could have a baby soon.”

What a performance! But Rebecca knew Catherine did not mean a single word.

“That ointment worked wonders,” Catherine continued, tilting her head. “After he rubbed it in, my whole belly felt so warm and comfortable. Right, Vance?”

So, that was the point-to flaunt that Vance had massaged her belly.

Rebecca shook her head. “I don’t need a check-up. Infertility isn’t always a woman’s issue. I suggest Vance get examined. This clinic probably has a men’s department, right?”

Vance turned livid, but she wasn’t done.

“Come on,” Rebecca continued in a concerned tone loud enough for the entire waiting area to hear, “men hate admitting problems in that area because of pride. But if there’s an issue, it should be treated. Don’t hide from it.”

Heads turned. Curious glances landed on Vance. No matter how tightly he frowned, he could not escape the stares.

Through gritted teeth, he hissed, “Stop talking nonsense!”

“I’m only trying to help. Don’t you want to be a dad soon?” She waved cheerfully. “I’ll leave you to it. Bye!”

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 167

Rebecca walked out of the clinic, a quiet realization settling over her.

Wherever she went now, she no longer hunched or tiptoed, terrified someone would notice her limp.

Her leg problem was an undeniable fact, yes, but it was not her fault and not a stain on her character. Why should she feel ashamed?

Love had once made her small. Loving someone who did not cherish her had made her small. Now that she had stopped loving, she could finally stand tall.

With that clarity, she would not be bothered again by Vance, Catherine, or anyone else. Nothing felt more exhilarating than the knowledge that she was about to spread her wings and fly.

Vance called after her, and Catherine called after him. In the end, he would stay with Catherine, just as he always chose her.

It no longer mattered. Vance had never truly been hers. Letting go of something that was never hers might sting for a short while, but the pain would pass.

Rebecca hailed a cab and headed straight to Josette’s house. The moment she reached the gate, she shouted for her grandmother, unable to contain her excitement.

Josette came out, pulled her into a tight hug, and beamed with joy.

Because of the stitches, a noticeable patch of hair had been shaved. Rebecca had styled it into a loose, jaunty bun to hide the spot.

Luckily, Josette didn't notice, just took her hand and led her inside, just like when she came home from school as a kid. The familiar aroma of home-cooked food filled the air.

Josette handed her the passport envelope. Rebecca tore it open at once, flipping through the two visa pages again and again, savoring every detail.

She explained which was the student visa and which was for the tour. Josette listened with a warm smile, congratulating her nonstop.

Yet a strong wave of reluctance washed over her. She wrapped her arms around Josette's waist. Grandma, would you come with me to see Aunt Kaitlyn?"

Josette thought for a moment, then nodded. "All right."

"Really?" Rebecca's face lit with pure delight.

"Yeah." Josette stroked Rebecca's cheek, glancing at the top of her head.

A pang of sadness hit her as she realized Rebecca was still hiding things.

Leaving Rebecca to go abroad alone was impossible. It was better to go along and watch her.

"Let's book the passport appointment right now!" Rebecca decided.

The process took time. After the tour, she could help Josette with the visa, and then they could leave together.

Rebecca checked her phone, saw open slots that afternoon, and booked one. After a joyful lunch, she rested a bit, then took Josette to the passport office.

Outside, the sun shone brilliantly, matching her good mood. She suggested, "Grandma, let's eat in the city tonight. I'll treat you to something nice!"

"Wonderful!" Josette never spoiled anyone's fun.

"How about Italian? Get a taste now!" Rebecca laughed heartily and reserved a table.

They still had time, so she led Josette strolling along the nearby street lined with charming cafés, tea houses, and quirky little restaurants.

"My goodness, this street has changed so much!" Josette marveled, recounting how it used to look. "There used to be a boutique here. When I was young, I came with my best friend to buy dresses."

Rebecca grinned, knowing Josette came from a scholarly family. Old photos at home showed her elegant poise.

“Let me get you something from this dessert store. It’s heavenly. Look at the line!” she said, pointing to a new shop with colorful creations that looked almost too beautiful to eat.

Josette hesitated. “These are all young folks. I’d stick out like a sore thumb.”

“Come on!” Rebecca pulled her into line.

The girls ahead kindly offered their stool to Josette. Rebecca’s heart swelled. “Thank you.”

These small acts of kindness made her love the world even more. She had hidden away too long, but it was not too late.

She bought a dessert and shared it with Josette. From now on, her life would be about cherishing Josette and building her own strength.

As dinnertime approached, she led Josette into the restaurant and requested a window table so they could watch the city lights come on.

They had just ordered when someone appeared-Vance Bradford.

He was clearly headed for a private room, but his hurried steps suddenly halted beside their table.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 168

“Josette? Rebecca?” Vance looked at them in surprise.

Josette assumed Rebecca had invited him. She smiled warmly. “Come sit! We’ve already ordered the dishes. Add whatever you like.”

But Vance wasn’t there to eat with them.

Rebecca stayed quiet. She merely tore off a piece of the complimentary bread, dipped it in the restaurant’s special sauce, and savored the rich flavor.

After a brief hesitation, Vance sat beside her. “No worries. I’m always busy and rarely get to eat with you guys. It’s fine. I’ll eat anything.”

Rebecca smirked. Spending so much time with Catherine had apparently taught him how to sound sweetly obliging.

Vance beckoned to the waiter and ordered a steak. But before the dishes were served, his phone rang.

Josette couldn't see the screen, but Rebecca caught the caller ID: Cathy Babe. Surprisingly, he rejected the call, but Catherine was persistent.

A text arrived instantly: [Have you arrived yet? We're all here.]

"Excuse me, I need to use the restroom," he said, standing.

Rebecca gave a soft snort. He paused, glancing at her.

She raised an eyebrow but said nothing. Today was for her and Josette; she would not let anything ruin it.

Josette smiled, "Go ahead."

Vance headed toward the back. That direction led to both restrooms and private rooms.

"I'm going too. Start eating if food arrives," Rebecca said.

"Go on." Josette nodded.

Rebecca followed just far enough to see Vance slip into a private room and pull the door almost-but not quite-shut.

The restaurant prided itself on ambiance, but its soundproofing was poor, Rebecca could hear every word.

"Rebecca is eating out here," Vance said the moment he entered.

"A coincidence?" Aiden scoffed. "Or is she stalking you?"

"No, she's with Josette," Vance answered. "You guys go ahead and eat. Order whatever you like. I'll foot the bills."

"You're staying out there?" Lucas asked.

"Yeah," Vance confirmed. "Josette is there. Can't disappoint her."

Rebecca nearly laughed out loud. She had won Vance from Catherine, and the reason was Josette?

Vance continued, “We can eat together anytime. We do it almost every day. Josette has always been kind to me, so...”

“I understand,” Catherine said softly. “You’re kind-hearted and respectful to elders. I get it. I used to be a volunteer myself.”

Rebecca had already walked away and missed the rest, but the word “volunteer” made her roll her eyes. Catherine had the nerve to claim that?

Back at the table, the appetizers had arrived. Josette didn’t eat raw food, so Rebecca had ordered eggs Benedict for her.

Josette eyed the wobbling dish uncertainly. “It’s so jiggly. If I poke it, won’t everything spill? How do you eat this? With my hands?”

Vance’s voice came from behind them. “Then eat it with your hands. What’s the harm?”

Josette quickly pulled back, looking even more nervous. Vance sat down again and smiled at her. “Do whatever feels comfortable.”

Josette shook her head. “I’d make a scene and embarrass you guys.”

“No one will laugh,” Vance assured her. “Eating is about enjoyment. There are no stuffy rules here.”

Still hesitant, Josette waited until Vance asked the waiter for a knife and fork. She tried, but the egg burst anyway. Yolk spilled onto her chin, clothes, and wrist.

Share

Support get it

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 169

“Oh no!” Josette fretted, mortified at losing face in front of Vance and afraid of embarrassing Rebecca.

“It’s fine. We’ll just clean it up.” Vance stood at once.

He fetched wet towels, gently wiping her hands and mouth until everything was neat again. Josette handled the rest of her clothes with napkins.

“I’m so sorry for the trouble,” she apologized.

“No worries at all.” Vance’s eyes softened with genuine emotion. “My grandmother raised me. I wish I could have taken care of her longer.”

Around the corner, two figures slipped past.

“Vance is just soft-hearted,” Aiden muttered. “Rebecca may not be the best wife, but he’s so filial to Josette. I think he’s making up for losing his own grandmother too early.”

“He has always been dutiful,” Catherine agreed, her eyes flashing with resentment. “When I volunteered at the hospital, helping care for his grandmother, he treated her exactly like this. Now he’s treating Rebecca’s grandmother the same way.”

“You are kind too, volunteering to help the elderly,” Aiden praised. “Both of you have good hearts.”

Catherine had already drifted into her own thoughts, emotions swirling behind her eyes.

Vance remained attentive throughout the meal. He cut Josette’s steak, split her oversized pasta, and carefully separated the ice-cream portion of the dessert.

He hustled around, leaving Rebecca with nothing to do. She had wanted to give Josette this new experience, yet he had taken over every task.

Bored, she reached her spoon toward the ice cream, but he blocked it. “You’d better not eat that.”

His gaze flicked to the top of her head. He caught himself, remembering Josette might not know.

Rebecca considered it, then nodded. With the trip so close, she could not risk anything. She switched her spoon to the cake instead.

Vance finished the ice cream himself.

She glared. “I suspect you just wanted it all for yourself and used that as an excuse.”

He gave an innocent look, and she snorted, “You’ve been way more attentive lately. Practice makes perfect, huh?”

She was implying he’d honed it with Catherine. The sarcasm sank in, and his jaw tightened.

“We’ll settle this later,” he said lightly, then turned to Josette. “Grandma, she’s been bullying me nonstop these days.”

Rebecca snorted at his fake playfulness.

The meal ended, and Vance offered to drive them home.

Rebecca helped Josette up, declining, “It’s fine. Go handle your stuff.”

“I have nothing tonight. Come on. It’s hard to find a cab at this hour,” he insisted, taking Josette’s other arm.

Rebecca relented, and they helped Josette into the back seat.

Vance glanced at her in the rearview mirror, hesitating. In the end, he said nothing, starting the car and driving off.

Half an hour later, they pulled up outside Josette’s courtyard. Vance got out first, then helped them out one after another.

“Thank you. Drive safely,” Rebecca said, reaching to close the gate.

He planted his hand on the gate, his tone bitter. “Not letting me in?”

Josette was still in the yard, so Rebecca kept her tone polite even though her face was cold. “Don’t you have other plans? I don’t want to hold you up.”

She leaned over and whispered, “The deadline is approaching. Sell those gifts and the house quickly. Cash them out.”

He kept his hand on the gate, staring at her with deep meaning. “Remember your rights but forget your duties?”

She paused. What duties?

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 170

With a cold laugh, Vance seized Rebecca’s wrist and tugged, breaking her grip on the gate.

He stepped inside and slid an arm around her waist. “Grandma, shall we buy some fruit?”

Rebecca’s heart jumped because her passport was still on the table.

Josette smiled, “No need. We’ve got plenty.”

“Alright.” Vance looked down at Rebecca with smug triumph, daring her to make a scene in front of

Josette.

She pressed her lips together, deciding to let it be. She would be gone in a few days anyway.

Inside, she glanced at the table at once. Thankfully, the passport had been put away.

“You guys take a rest. I’ll cut the watermelon,” Josette said, seating them.

“I’ll do it.” Vance released Rebecca, heading to the kitchen. “Where is it? Ah, found it.”

Summer evenings with watermelon and a cool breeze were pure bliss. The sun had set, and the yard lights came on, twinkling like fireflies among the flowers.

Josette set a small table and served the sliced watermelon. Vance brewed tea, brought out two plates of nuts, and pulled Rebecca out to cool off.

Leaning back in the rocking chair, he relaxed. “Summer nights are the best. During school breaks, I used to sit in the yard with my grandmother, eating watermelon just like this.”

Josette fanned herself with a large, round palm-leaf fan.

“Still feeling hot, Grandma?” Vance asked. “My grandmother used a fan exactly like that—big and round.”

Josette’s fan was worn and frayed; few people used them anymore.

“It’s not only for the breeze,” she chuckled. “It shoos mosquitoes too.”

“Ah, that’s why you fan your legs!” Vance laughed softly, looking into the distance.

He lost himself in memory, and the courtyard fell quiet.

After a while, he spoke again. “In a few days, when I’m less swamped, let’s take a family trip. Where would you like to go? The grasslands? The beach? Or abroad?”

Afraid Josette would spill her secret, Rebecca said quickly, “I’m busy, and so is Grandma.”

“What could keep you two so busy?” Vance sounded amused, as though they had nothing to do.

“Busy is busy,” she answered flatly.

She was not idle. In ways he knew nothing about, she had accomplished a great deal.

Used to getting his way as a CEO, Vance rarely changed his mind once decided. He continued planning.” Three or five days should be enough for me to finish everything. Grandma, pick a destination. I’ll have my assistant book tickets and hotels.”

In five years of marriage, this was the first time he had suggested a trip.

Right after the wedding, Rebecca’s leg was still healing, so a honeymoon was impossible. He had taken only one day off and returned to the office the next morning, claiming he was busy.

She had known the truth: he would rather sit in a café until ten at night than come home to face her. Later, when she could walk a little, she had excitedly planned a trip to make up for the missed honeymoon.

He had refused, again saying he was busy. One day, she overheard him on the phone saying he would skip his vacation so Aiden could take it.

After that, she never mentioned traveling with him again. Now he brought it up himself—not for her, but to make up for the regret over his grandmother.

He had never had the chance to show her the world.

Josette, exhausted from the long day, grew sleepy by nine. Vance tidied the yard and headed inside, clearly intending to stay.

“You can go,” Rebecca said, grabbing a pillow to sleep with Josette.

He blocked the doorway. “We still have a score to settle.”

As she blinked in confusion, he closed the bedroom door.

“What stunt are you pulling now?” she sighed, tired of his frequent outbursts.

“Have you forgotten what you said at the clinic?” he asked back.

Of course, she hadn’t forgotten.

“I never knew you were so good at it.” He yanked the pillow from her arms and tossed it back on the bed.

“What is wrong with you lately?” she snapped, exhausted by his meltdowns.

“How did you find out my problem?” he demanded, gripping her shoulders.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 171

Rebecca gaped at him. “Wait! Do you really have a problem?”

Vance was speechless. “Think before you speak!”

She swatted his hands away. “People get defensive about the things they lack most. Call a truly beautiful woman ugly, and she won’t care. Because her beauty is obvious. Call me lame, and I’d be furious. Because it’s true.”

“So?” he said. “What’s all this roundabout talk leading to?”

She rolled her eyes. “So, you’re this furious because you really can’t perform. If you could, my words wouldn’t bother you at all.”

He was livid. “I’ve known you for 12 years, and I never realized how sharp-tongued you’ve become. Who taught you to talk like this?”

She shrugged. “There are plenty of things you don’t know.”

“Oh? Like what?” His eyes darkened. “Like whatever is going on between you and that dance boy?”

“Show some respect!” she snapped.

He was a scumbag himself. Did he assume everyone else was just like him?

“Respect?” He scooped her up in his arms. “Have you shown any respect to your husband? Or should I say, to your provider? You spend my money and pick up that sharp tongue from shady people. Then you come home and throw it in my face. Do you think that’s fair?”

“Shady people? Look in the mirror before you call anyone else shady!” she fired back.

He carried her to the bed in a few strides and tumbled onto it with her. “I think you need a serious reality check!”

“Let go of me!” she warned. “I don’t want to yank your hair or bite your shoulder again!”

“Go ahead and try it!” He reached for her pajamas. “You’re living off me and enjoying every perk of being Mrs. Bradford. Even if you bite my neck off today, you’re still going to fulfill your marital duties!”

So, that was what he meant by duties. Talking to him was exhausting.

She fought back with everything she had, sinking her teeth hard into his shoulder. He refused to let go, only growling more fiercely, “Bite harder! Tear the whole chunk off! Were you not saying I can’t perform? You haven’t even tested it, so how are you so sure?”

She grew tired and finally released him. Her eyes landed on the vase on the nightstand, and she snatched it up. “Let go, or I swear I’ll smash this over your head!”

Blood stained her lips from the bite, and combined with her fierce glare, she looked coldly menacing, like a vampire.

A storm swirled in his eyes. “Do you hate me that much?”

One solid swing could leave him bleeding or worse-bedridden for life.

In the end, he backed down, and she loosened her grip, dropping the vase onto the bed.

Did she hate him? She had once, as fiercely as she had loved him. But now, she only felt bone-deep weariness.

“I’m really tired of this,” she said quietly. “Just let me have a few peaceful days.”

He left-not because he chose to, but because Catherine called. Before he walked out, he had calmed down enough to explain, “Cathy is moving out of the house. I need to help her.”

Rebecca nodded. “Go ahead.”

He still seemed uncertain. “You really “?” ly

She shook her head, and he sighed, “All right, I forgive you. I know your sharp tongue lately is because of Cathy. No matter what I say, you’ve always had a grudge against her. Once I clear my schedule, I’ll take you on that trip. Didn’t you want to make up for the missed honeymoon? We’ll bring Josette along, so stop acting out.”

He pinched her cheek on his way out, still convinced she was jealous. She didn’t bother explaining anymore; he wouldn’t listen anyway.

The metallic taste of blood lingered in her mouth. She got up to rinse it out.

When she returned, Josette was waiting outside the door, looking deeply worried. “Becky, what on earth is going on between you two?”

Support

Share

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 172

“Grandma...” Rebecca saw no point in hiding it anymore. “Vance and I aren’t meant for each other. Back then, he married me only because I saved his life. The truth is, he doesn’t like me, and I don’t like him. We are better off apart.”

Josette sighed, pulling her into a hug. “Marriage can’t be forced. I understand. If it’s not making you happy, ending it sooner is kinder. But you’re leaving the country in just a few days. Are you still not telling him?”

It wasn’t that she didn’t want to. She simply had a feeling that the moment she told him, he would do everything possible to stop her. And she had no idea what other trouble he might stir up.

It was better to stay quiet. Once she was gone, he would figure it out on his own.

“I’ll tell him when the time is right,” she said, already planning to leave him a note on the day she departed. She leaned against Josette. “I’ll sleep with you tonight.”

“Of course.” Josette patted her back gently.

“Your passport will be mailed home soon. When I get back, I’ll take you to apply for the visa. By August, we can go together and finally reunite with Aunt Kaitlyn.”

“Okay.”

When she woke the next morning, it was day five of the countdown.

For the next five days, she had no intention of going home. She planned to spend her mornings at the clinic for those sessions.

Since Edwin had been so dedicated and hoped she would finish the course, she would push through a few more days. In the afternoons, she would head back to stay with Josette.

As they sat down for breakfast, noises came from the courtyard.

“Mom! Mom!” Soren called out.

Rebecca frowned. What was he doing here?

Before she could figure it out, Soren burst into the house, followed by Adeline and Emmett.

“You’re here,” Josette greeted them without much warmth. “Have you eaten?”

“Yeah,” Soren answered quickly, then turned to Rebecca with a mocking smile. “Well, look who’s here. Our fancy Mrs. Bradford.”

It was impossible to tell whether he was sneering or flattering. From childhood, Rebecca had rarely heard a kind word from him.

After their last blowout at home, they had cut off all contact. He only visited Josette when he wanted money, and even then, it was rare.

She ignored him and kept eating her pasta.

“What brings you here today?” Josette asked without looking up. “Didn’t I already give you money?”

Rebecca nearly dropped her fork. Josette was still giving him money? That was completely backward.

“Why are you taking her money?” She demanded, her appetite gone.

“You little brat! Today is my birthday. You won’t even give me a cent, and you have the nerve to question me?” Soren raised his hand as if to slap her.

“Put that hand down!” Josette snapped. “Touch a single hair, and you’ll regret it!”

Soren wasn’t truly afraid of his mother, but he had an agenda and didn’t want to ruin the atmosphere. Still, he wasn’t about to pass up any chance to squeeze something out of Rebecca.

“It’s your dad’s birthday,” Adeline jumped in, laying on the guilt. “You should show some filial respect.” 2

“Birthday?” Rebecca snorted. “When is mine?”

Her parents had never once celebrated her birthday. Every single one had been with Josette.

After marriage, Vance would join them at Josette’s to celebrate and bring gifts, though she later learned the sick meaning behind those watches.

In the past 20-plus years, they had never been part of it, and they never remembered Josette’s birthday either.

“Well...” Adeline faltered.

“Who forces their mother to celebrate their birthday?” Soren barked.

“Oh,” Rebecca said flatly. “So, you do know the rule. Then return the money to my grandma.”

Anger got the better of Soren, and his hand rose again.

Share

Support

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 173

Rebecca lifted her chin and stared him down, daring him to strike.

Adeline grabbed Soren’s arm, winking at him. “She’s grown up now and has her pride. Don’t get violent.”

Soren understood the real message: Rebecca was now Vance’s wife, and they still needed his financial support.

For that sake, he swallowed his rage.

“We raised you,” Adeline said in a motherly tone. “You should be grateful.”

“You raised me?” Rebecca countered. “Did you feed me or pay for my schooling? No. Josette did everything.”

Adeline flushed red. “We gave birth to you. That counts for something. Without us, you wouldn’t exist. For that alone, you owe your dad a proper birthday celebration.” 2

“Oh yeah?” Rebecca turned to Emmett. “Since birth is such a big deal, how much did he chip in? I will match whatever he gave.”

Emmett’s face flushed red. “Why drag me into this?”

“How much? Spill it!” she pressed while knowing the answer.

“How can he be compared to you?” Soren snapped. “Starting a business is hard, and he’s getting married soon. I don’t want much. Just follow through on that house you mentioned last time.”

“Exactly,” Adeline echoed. “Your situations are different. You struck gold with your marriage and skipped 20 years of struggle. Most people work their whole lives and never reach what slips through your fingers. Stop obsessing over how much Vance spends on you. It’s his duty. Think more of us. We’re your real family.”

Their shamelessness made Rebecca laugh.

Josette trembled with rage. “Do you have any shred of parental decency left? No wonder you can’t treat the kids fairly! Worse, you’re dragging down Rebecca.”

“You’re playing favorites again,” Adeline complained. “Emmett is your grandson, yet you side with Rebecca every time.”

“My grandson?” Josette huffed. “Does he carry my name?”

“Aren’t you still a Perry?” Adeline rolled her eyes, then suddenly brightened. “You’re not seeing some old man, are you? Is that why you’re talking like this?”

Soren glared suspiciously. “At your age, don’t be foolish!”

Josette grabbed a chair, hurled it at Soren, and clutched her chest, gasping. Rebecca jumped up to steady her, terrified of a heart attack.

“You never come here without causing trouble!” Rebecca shouted at her parents. “Can’t you just stay away?”

“How dare you talk to me like that?” Soren slammed his fist on the table.

“Slam it again! Try it!” Josette rasped with fury.

Soren fumed, then held back. “I really came here to see you. I know my birthday is your tough day. Look. I’ve got you something, trying to pay you back.”

He pulled out an envelope and handed it to her. But neither woman believed him. Without a choice, he opened it himself, pulled out the cash, laid it on the table, and pushed it over.

“See? Crisp new bills from the bank,” he said.

Yet Rebecca didn’t believe for a second that he had turned over a new leaf.

“What is your endgame?” she demanded.

“Don’t talk to elders like that!” he warned.

Adeline carried over a basket. “We really did come to visit, Josette. Soren knows how hard it’s been for you, so he wants to honor you on his birthday. I’ll cook, and we’ll have a nice family meal together.”

Josette knew their true colors too well. No way they’d change overnight. This meal definitely came with strings attached.

“It’s fine,” she refused. “Go back and eat it yourselves.”

“Come on.” Adeline ignored her protests. “We’re family. I’m going to cook now.”

She hauled the basket to the kitchen. Josette was old, and Rebecca’s leg made it impossible to stop her.

“Let them stay,” Josette said wearily. “We’ll go out.”

“What?” Soren squeezed his eyes, forcing out a pitiful expression. “We came all this way to celebrate with you, and you’re leaving? It breaks my heart. Don’t you love me anymore? Or Emmett?”

Choplan MA

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 174

Soren nudged Emmet, urging him to speak.

Emmett reluctantly stepped forward, face twisted in fake sorrow. “Grandma, didn’t you love me the most when I was little? Now it’s only my sister? Do you look down on me because I can’t make as much money as she can?”

“Nonsense!” Josette shook with anger. “Besides the three of you, who in this house cares about money?”

“Then why don’t you love me anymore? It breaks my heart,” he sobbed.

Josette couldn’t bring herself to speak harshly to her grandson. Her eyes dimmed with pain, but Rebecca wasn’t one to relent so easily.

“Grandma doesn’t love you? How can you say something so heartless, Emmett?” she snapped. “When you were little, Mom and Dad only partied. Who raised you? They couldn’t even afford formula. Who bought it? When you were sick, who paid the medical

bills and stayed up all night with you? For college, they gave nothing. Who paid your tuition and sent you allowances? Grandma's savings have been drained dry by all of you, and you have the nerve to claim she doesn't love you?"

Emmett looked away. "That was Grandpa. He loved me the most."

"Fine," Rebecca said coldly. "Go ask him for investment money, business projects, a wedding house- everything."

Emmett's face darkened. "That's Vance's effort."

"Then why are you here sucking up to everyone?" Rebecca huffed. "What's your real game?"

"We are here for Grandma," he countered. "Why do you think the worst?"

"Yeah, we're just visiting. Calm down, Rebecca." Adeline emerged from the kitchen holding a piece of meat.

Soren and Emmett blocked the door, refusing to let Rebecca and Josette leave. The standoff dragged on until noon.

Adeline set the dishes on the table. Soren brought out a bottle of wine and wanted to toast Josette.

"I'm sick. I can't drink," she refused flatly.

"That's fine." Soren raised his glass. "Mom, I want to thank you for raising Rebecca and Emmett. Thank you for everything you've done for this family."

On full alert, Rebecca stayed close to Josette and didn't eat anything.

After a few rounds of wine, Soren loosened up and revealed his true purpose-this country house.

"I'm struggling, living off Vance's handouts," he sighed. "Emmett is getting married, but I have no house for him. His girlfriend's belly is already showing. Without a house, the wedding won't happen. Please, have pity on me. Give me this house so I can move out and let them have our current place. Adeline and

I will come live here."

Josette and Rebecca exchanged a glance. They both sensed there was more to it.

"It's possible," Josette said. "If Emmett is really getting married, you can vacate your place and move here."

“Well...” Soren hesitated. “You’d have to transfer the title to me.”

Josette itched to fork him out of there. “This house belongs to Kaitlyn. When your dad passed, you took every penny, including my share. Said the country house was worthless and gave it to her.”

“That’s not fair,” he argued. “You tricked me, saying that was all his honey. But you hid a fortune. Dad had way more. Who are you hoarding it for? Kaitlyn is living large abroad, and Rebecca has endless money from Vance. Are you keeping it for some old man?”

Josette clutched her chest and gasped, nearly passing out from rage. She pointed at him and cursed, ”

You animal!”

Rebecca frantically rubbed Josette’s back. “Grandma, don’t fall for it. He is provoking you on purpose. Stay calm. Don’t let him get to you.”

Support

Share get it

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 175

Soren leaned closer. “Give me the house, and I won’t pursue the hidden money. Otherwise, hand over ten million.”

“Why not just kill me?” Josette shrieked, slapping him across the face. “I don’t have even a thousand!”

“That’s not cool, Mom.” Soren clicked his tongue like a thug. “No house? Then I’ll just search for your stash myself.”

He signaled Adeline and Emmett, who immediately rushed toward Josette’s bedroom.

“Middle drawer! Smash the lock!” he shouted, following them.

Rebecca helped Josette into a chair, then lunged forward to block the bedroom door. “Don’t you dare go in!”

“Think you can stop the three of us?” Soren laughed mockingly. “Give it up, sweetheart. Go home and serve your rich husband. You’ll get whatever you want. Emmett, ram it!”

Rebecca gripped the doorframe with both hands and held on desperately. No matter how hard the three shoved, she refused to budge.

Her nails splintered and broke. Blood seeped from her fingertips. She hated her own weakness, unable to fend off the three ingrates.

“If anyone steps through that door today, I’ll die right here in front of you!” Josette grabbed a kitchen knife and pressed it to her throat.

“Grandma, no!” Rebecca screamed in horror. “Please don’t! If you’re gone, they win!”

The desperate cry snapped Josette back to reality. If she died, every cent in her account and this house would go straight to these animals.

The knife slipped from her fingers and clattered to the floor.

Soren threw his head back and howled with laughter. “That’s my girl! Let’s see how long you can hold out!

Rebecca’s fingers bled freely, and her grip was slipping. In one last desperate move, she slammed her forehead into Emmett’s chest and screamed, “You’ll have to walk over my dead body!”

The words had barely left her mouth when screams rang out. A pair of arms wrapped around her, followed by a cold voice. “Who is trying to walk over my wife’s body? You’ll have to go through me first!”

Vance took one of her bloody hands in his. “Who the hell hurt her hand?”

His gaze swept across every face in the room. Whoever it landed on shrank back.

“You?” His eyes locked on Soren.

“No, not me.” Soren shook his head frantically, then forced a greasy smile. “Vance, it’s been a while.”

“Shut up!” Vance snapped. “I showed respect because you’re Rebecca’s father. But before that, you need to be a decent human being. I don’t deal with beasts.”

The insult was harsh, especially coming from a younger man. Soren was mortified, but he didn’t dare to snap back.

Instead, he stepped closer, bowing and scraping. “Of course not. Rebecca is my daughter. I love her more than anything. Parents discipline out of love, right? A little tough love never hurt anyone. Emmett, tell him.”

“Exactly,” Emmett echoed, switching from arrogant punk to bootlicker instantly. “My dad beats me at home like I’m the red-headed stepchild.”

Soren and Adeline exchanged a confused glance.

Vance wasn’t amused. “Doesn’t matter who spawned you or what you turned out to be. You love acting pathetic? Fine. But Rebecca is no part of it.”

Soren’s jowls trembled, but he forced a smile. “You’re right. Rebecca is blessed to have you by her side.”

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 176

Rebecca didn’t understand why her family feared Vance so much. He was just an ordinary person with no superpower and just more cash.

These people kissed up and punched down. They acted tough in front of the vulnerable and shrank in front of real power and wealth.

If Soren had stood against Vance the way he had done to them, Rebecca would have respected him a bit more. If the three of them had used brute force, could they not have overpowered one man?

But they went soft the instant they saw him. Shameless didn’t even begin to cover it.

Vance’s arrival changed everything. With one arm around Rebecca and the other around Josette, he stood like their protector. “I’m taking Rebecca to get her hands bandaged. You people can leave now.”

Exchanging looks with Adeline, Soren chuckled awkwardly. “We’ll stay and watch the house.”

“You think I will allow that?” Vance sneered.

Soren’s grin froze. “This is where I grew up.”

He was implying this was their family business.

“All I know is that this is Josette’s home,” Vance said calmly. “You’re not leaving? Fine. Wait here.”

He pulled out his phone to make a call. “Lucas, round up a dozen guys. I’ll send you the location. Guard the house. If even one leaf is missing from the yard, beat them within an inch of their lives.”

“Vance, don’t...” Soren grabbed his arm. “I’m your father-in-law. You can’t do this to me. Fine, we’re leaving.”

“I’m always fair,” Vance sneered. “But if you don’t get it, don’t blame me for being ruthless.”

Soren got the message and signaled for Adeline and Emmett to head out.

Vance watched until they walked through the gate. Then he guided Josette and Rebecca out, locked the door, and instructed the driver to stay outside. “Any disturbance, call me and the police.”

He helped the two women into the car and drove to the nearest hospital.

“Grandma,” he said, sounding apologetic, “I was a bit harsh today. But with Rebecca’s hand like that, I couldn’t take it. If you want to scold me, I will accept it.”

Josette teared up, taking Rebecca’s hand. “It’s my fault for not controlling Soren. I didn’t raise him right.”

“Don’t beat yourself up,” he said gently. “I believe character is in the genes. He has always been flaky. I tolerated him for Rebecca’s sake, but today he went too far. It’s not your fault. Under the same upbringing, Kaitlyn and Rebecca both turned out kind and decent. He simply inherited a rotten core.”

Josette didn’t feel comforted. In the end, it all traced back to marrying the wrong man.

“Grandma, don’t be sad.” Rebecca leaned against her. “My hands are fine. It’s nothing serious.”

Support

Share get it

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 177

“Nothing serious? Your fingers are connected to your heart.” Josette cradled Rebecca’s hand, heartbroken.

“Really, it’s fine,” Rebecca reassured her with a small smile.

Compared to the pain of the car crash years ago, this was nothing. She noticed Vance’s grim expression, guessing he was recalling the crash, too.

It was a dark chapter and a sore spot. The accident had led directly to their marriage and become the root of all his resentment.

It was fine. Soon enough, they would be both free.

Vance silently drove them to the hospital. After Rebecca’s hands were cleaned and bandaged, he suggested, “Grandma, why don’t you rest at our place for a while? Rebecca and I have something to handle first. We’ll pick you up later and go to your house together.”

“It’s fine.” Josette declined. “I will go back now. You guys do your thing. I know how to deal with that worthless son.”

“All right. I’ll speak with the village head,” Vance said. “By the way, do you know why he suddenly wants this house so badly?”

Josette shook her head.

“He heard somewhere that the whole village is being redeveloped into a tourism project. Houses here will be demolished.”

“No wonder...”

“What about house ownership?”

“When his dad died, that scoundrel took every penny, including my share. He said the country house was worthless and gave it to Kaitlyn.”

“Is there a will?”

“No. We didn’t know better back then.”

“I got it. Leave it to me.”

When he dropped her home, the driver was still there, lounging in the shade on the rocking chair. The door was locked, and he was sipping bubble tea.

Soren lingered outside, trying to wheedle the driver.

Vance was amused by the scene. “Quite cozy, huh?”

The driver scratched his head sheepishly. “Sir.”

“Drink up. Order anything you like. My treat,” Vance smiled, helping Josette inside.

Soren tried to follow, and Vance glanced back.

He grinned, but Vance slammed the door in his face. His smile vanished, and he spat, “Bah! Money makes you king? Ridiculous!”

“Money does rule,” Emmett mumbled. “If you hate it, don’t take his money.”

“Didn’t all my money go to you?”

“Did I see a single cent? Vance funds my company. Your cash is for your gambling.”

“You little punk...”

“Stop fighting!” Adeline cried. “What do we do now?”

Vance came out and walked off, ignoring Soren’s fresh grin. He got into the car parked by the road, but instead of leaving the area, he drove to the village office.

“I’ll speak with the village head. Will be back soon,” he told Rebecca.

Whatever he said inside worked. The village head personally escorted him out. Back in the car, Vance said, “It’s settled. Your parents will leave soon.”

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 178

Vance was efficient, always achieving his goals. Now, only the matter between the two of them remained.

“I’ve done everything you asked,” he said. “The house has been sold. All the bags and gifts have been cashed out. The money is all yours.”

He pulled out his phone and transferred the funds. Rebecca checked the amount and nodded.

“To prove my sincerity, I’ll take you to see it. The house has already changed ownership, and the buyer is preparing for renovation.” He started the car. “After you see it, please keep your promise and go to the police station to withdraw the case.”

Rebecca's hands were still bandaged, and the wound on her head had only just healed.

"I know pushing you now is not exactly humane," he sighed. "But this has to be done eventually. Cathy has already fulfilled her part. Dragging it out is making her uneasy."

She twisted her wrist. The white gauze looked glaring in the sunlight. People could be human one moment and monsters the next.

"Are you with me?"

"Don't rush me. It will be done in a couple of days."

Before she left the country, she would make sure everything was settled.

"What does that mean? Delaying it is not cool."

She smiled bitterly, realizing he had misunderstood!!!

He slammed on the brakes. "You're not playing me, are you? I've been running around like an idiot doing everything you asked. Don't tell me you are bailing on me now. Are you testing my patience?"

"No," she replied calmly. "Let's do it now."

He studied her faint smile, unsure whether she was lying. "Even if you refuse today, I'll drag you there by force."

His gaze was penetrating. It was as if the man who had fiercely protected her earlier had been an illusion. He drove off, heading to a residential complex. As they parked, Catherine came down carrying a big bag.

Seeing his car, she rushed over with a pitiful expression.

He got out quickly. "What's wrong? What is in the bag?"

"I was just about to call you," she sobbed.

"What happened? Why are you crying?" He bent down, concerned.

"Nothing. I'm just sad." She burst into tears. "It took me so long to decorate that place. It was the home you gave me. There are so many memories-nights we spent drinking and chatting. And now it's all gone."

Vance glanced back at the car. Rebecca poked her head out and grinned at him-a grin that felt creepy and led him to think she was plotting something.

Catherine didn't see their exchange, still dabbing at her tears.

She opened the bag and added, "Can I keep these dolls? Tell Rebecca they aren't luxury items. Let me have them. You bought them when you missed me. They're things I like, and anyway, they're not what she would want."

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Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 179

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Support

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Vance glanced at the car once again. Rebecca leaned on the window, smiling at them.

Those were the exact dolls she had shipped to his office. Catherine had taken them.

“Hi!” She waved. “I’m right here. You can tell me directly. No need to go through him.”

Catherine froze in shock, then grew even more flustered at Rebecca’s smirk. She fretted that Rebecca would refuse to withdraw the case because of her actions.

“Rebecca...” She began her performance. “I’m sorry. Could you cut me some slack? I really can’t bear to part with these dolls. The luxury items, the house, the watches, jewelry, the money... I don’t care about any of that. But these dolls... Vance collected them from all over the world for me. They may not be worth much, but they’re priceless to me. You don’t like them anyway. Can I keep them?”

“They’re just trash I threw away. If you like them, keep them.” Rebecca waved it off, glancing at Vance pointedly.

Her tone was biting, striking a nerve. He started to argue, “Rebecca...”

She cut him off, continuing, “You heard her, Vance. She said she doesn’t want houses, luxury items, watches, jewelry, or money. So, don’t insult her pure soul by giving her any of those things anymore. That wouldn’t be right.” 1

His eyes narrowed. “Should I insult you with them instead?”

“No, I don’t see it as an insult,” she replied smoothly. “It is what I deserve. Shower me with it all you like. I don’t mind. Just don’t insult her anymore. Right, Catherine?”

Catherine’s mouth hung open, but no words came out.

“All right, quit yapping,” Vance said, hauling the bag inside. “We need to finish this before rush hour.”

Catherine hovered by the passenger door, then reluctantly climbed into the back seat. She shot Rebecca a venomous look, then pointed at the cartoon ornament hanging from the rearview mirror.

“Rebecca, I took down your wooden plaque and hung this instead,” she said. “You don’t mind, right? It’s so cute, and it makes Vance smile when he drives.”

Rebecca truly didn’t understand how Catherine-knowing full well she was the other woman-had the nerve to provoke her again and again.

Thankfully, she no longer wanted this marriage or this man. Otherwise, she would have died of anger long ago.

“Oh, that plaque?” She shrugged. “He is wearing it around his neck now. Didn’t you know?”

She had noticed it earlier when he held her at Josette's house.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 180

"You like that plaque so much, Vance?" Catherine grumbled, her voice laced with hurt, as if he had betrayed her.

He remained silent.

"It's made of sandalwood and carved into a charm shape," Rebecca explained. "To bless him with safety and good fortune."

"Sandalwood?" Catherine murmured. "Is it very expensive? Vance, I'm sorry."

She was always like that, teary-eyed at anything, as if she had suffered the worst unfairness in the world.

She turned to Rebecca. "I'm sorry. I didn't know it was valuable. I thought it was just an ordinary piece of wood."

"Oh?" Rebecca countered. "Weren't you just saying money doesn't matter and only the heart does? Why scorn the plaque now? Isn't it from the heart? I carved it myself."

Catherine fidgeted, as if on the verge of breaking down. "I really didn't know you had carved it. Otherwise, I wouldn't have removed it. Vance didn't say anything, so I thought it was just a random piece of wood. I'm so sorry."

"Our great CEO would hang a random piece of wood in such a prominent spot?" Rebecca glanced at Vance. "It must have a special meaning."

He furrowed his brow. "Enough. Both of you, stop talking."

Rebecca was happy to stay silent; she had no desire to chat with either of them. But Catherine wouldn't let it go.

"Vance, it's not your anniversary gift, is it? Then I made a terrible mistake. I'll take mine down and put the plaque back up." She turned to Rebecca again. "It was all my fault. I didn't know it meant so much."

"Say no more, Cathy," he reminded her again.

Rebecca couldn't tell if she was provoking or probing. Catherine leaned forward and whispered, "Don't hold it against me, okay? I really didn't know."

Rebecca hadn't planned to expose it at all, but she was tired of the back-and-forth. One sentence would end it all. "You're apologizing to the wrong person. That was the handiwork of Vance's grandmother. You should apologize to her."

Catherine froze, and Vance's face darkened. "Why bring that up? She knew nothing about it."

"No?" Rebecca said innocently. "Didn't you say your grandmother was the most important person in your life? Isn't this plaque her precious keepsake? Has that changed?"

"Rebecca!" Vance hissed.

Rebecca guessed he was going to scold her, but something held him back. He still needed her to withdraw the case.

She calmly smiled at him. Sure enough, he swallowed his anger and said, "Until this is done, no talking."

She shrugged, her mind drifting to the past. Back then, she had been just like Catherine-eager to hang something meaningful in his car to bless his safety.

Among them was a tourmaline pendant, meant to protect him on the road. She had never intended to remove what was already there-just to hang hers alongside it.

But he had refused, "My car is my private space. No other ornaments. My grandma is the most important person to me. I don't want anything else to hang next to her keepsake."¹

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