Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 181

Vance's words had wounded Rebecca more deeply than she ever let on.

Even so, she had managed to rationalize it, telling herself that he just hadn't fallen for her yet. It was normal for him to treat her as an outsider.

She had foolishly believed things would get better, thinking that his private space was only for him and the memories related to his grandmother.

She had been wrong. There was someone else who occupied that sacred space. It was Catherine.

Lost in the bitter swirl of her thoughts, Rebecca stopped paying attention to whatever Vance and Catherine were doing. Then his voice, low and coaxing, pulled her back.

"Cheer up," he murmured. "I'm not blaming you. Smile. Do it for me. It makes everything feel lighter."

Through the rearview mirror, Rebecca watched Catherine's tear-streaked face brighten into a radiant, almost childlike smile.

So, he was comforting his mistress right in front of her. The absurdity of it nearly made her laugh.

Catherine caught her eye in the mirror and gave her a deliberate, taunting glance. Rebecca responded with a small, almost amused smile.

Catherine faltered, and Rebecca lost interest in both of them. She closed her eyes and shut them out completely.

Vance drove straight to the police station. When Rebecca stepped out of the car, Catherine cried out theatrically, "Vance, go help her! She can't walk freely."

Her loud voice drew glances from people nearby. She was always full of drama, never missing a chance to stir things up, just like Vance's lapdogs, Aiden and Lucas.

They all seemed desperate to remind the entire world that a woman with a limp could never truly deserve him.

If they insisted on drawing attention to her disability, she would give them exactly what they seemed to want. Standing still, she turned around and whined, "Honey, come quickly. My leg is hurting. Help me, please."

She knew that he would come. He couldn't deny their relationship or ignore his duties as a husband.

He still needed her signature to drop the case against Catherine. Only a fool would keep provoking her at such a moment.

Vance paused, then walked over and slid an arm beneath hers to support her weight.

"I thought you weren't coming," she said, letting mockery color her tone.

A complicated emotion flickered in his eyes, "If I hadn't, who knows what kind of scene you would have made? You always find a way to make things more embarrassing for me."

That was true.

"You've changed so much," he said quietly, his voice stripped of warmth. "I barely recognize you anymore.

Like an emotionless crutch, he steered her into the police station. The paperwork to withdraw the complaint was straightforward and mercifully brief.

When they stepped outside again, Vance heaved a sigh of relief. "No matter how things stand between us, thank you."

"You're welcome," she replied coolly. "But I only withdrew the case against Catherine. Yours still stands. So, if anyone owes me thanks, it isn't you."

"What's so hard about that?" He shrugged. "Cathy is sweet, you know. She's always wanted to be friends with you. You're the one who keeps pushing her away. I'll call her over now."

"No need," Rebecca interrupted firmly. "If she is really grateful, she should just stay out of my sight."

"Rebecca," he sighed, rubbing the back of his neck. "That's actually what I wanted to talk to you about. Why do you have to treat her with such hostility? She only hung a little charm on my rearview mirror. It was a harmless, kind gesture. But you dragged my grandmother into the argument and placed an enormous accusation on her shoulders. How could she handle that?"

Rebecca met his gaze and offered only a faint, silent smile.

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Vance was the one who had brought up his grandma to explain things and mark his private space. Had he considered Rebecca's feelings then?

"That smile again," he said, frowning. His deep eyes seemed to stir with something restless. "You've been giving me that same smile a lot lately. It unsettles me."

"How so?" she chuckled. "Would you prefer that I scream and throw things instead?"

He looked away, silent for a long moment, clearly searching for the right words.

"Let's leave it here for today," he said at last. "I'll call a car to take you home. I need to drop off Cathy."

"That's fine," she replied easily. "But you don't need to call one. I'll handle it myself."

He closed his eyes briefly, visibly reining in his frustration. "Can you please stop throwing tantrums for five minutes?"

"I'm not." She blinked, genuinely puzzled. "I said I would do it myself because I know you're busy. How is that wrong?"

"You are not saying the opposite on purpose? Not sulking? Not jealous?" His voice edged higher. "Yes, ideally, I should have taken you home myself. But the driver is still at Josette's house. Catherine just lost everything-her house, the bags, the watches, the jewelry. She's emotionally fragile right now. I need to make sure of her safety and escort her back to the hotel. And you get angry about it? Honestly, I doubt if you ever loved me. Otherwise, why couldn't you tolerate my friends?"

She tilted her head. "No need to wonder. I haven't."

He stared. "Haven't what?"

"Haven't loved you," she enunciated.

He was furious. "Ugh, you're driving me crazy! Why is it impossible to have a reasonable conversation with you? Do you have to be so stubborn and spiteful?"

She itched to throw those words back at him. How could she reason with him? She was not jealous at all, and she had no opinion whatsoever about him escorting Catherine to a hotel.

"First, I'm not jealous," she said wearily. "Second, whatever love there once was has disappeared. Third, why don't we simply go and file for divorce right now? Surely, that will convince you."

"Unbelievable!" His voice cracked with anger, "Now you're threatening me with divorce?"

He turned and stormed off. She wondered, not for the first time, which of them was truly being unreasonable.

She watched for a while, then quietly opened a ride-hailing app on her phone.

She was in a rush to get back to Josette's house. There wasn't much time left. In just a few days, she would be leaving, and Vance would finally grasp the depths of her determination.

There would be no more counting on him to shield Josette. She needed to find a new place for Josette to stay, somewhere her parents couldn't find.

When she returned in a month, Rebecca would handle Josette's visa and take her away.

When she reached the village house, Vance's driver was still stationed there. Her parents and Emmett were already gone.

"Madam." The driver quickly got up from the rocking chair, looking as though he were silently asking how much longer this assignment would last.

"You can leave now," she said.

He shook his head vigorously. Without explicit orders from Vance, he didn't dare to leave. Rebecca shrugged instead of dwelling on it.

She stepped inside and whispered the entire plan to Josette, who gripped her hand and finally gave one firm, decisive nod.

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Josette and Rebecca began packing their things.

Having the driver guard outside was unexpectedly useful. Her parents were kept at bay. Even if they showed up, they wouldn't be able to force their way in.

Under Rebecca's quiet urging, Josette selected only the most essential items: identification papers, bank cards, property deeds, and the few truly valuable pieces of jewelry she owned.

Everything fit neatly into a single canvas bag, and the other things were left behind. The whole process took only half an hour.

As they stepped out of the house, Josette took one last look back and smiled wistfully. She carefully removed the photographs from the frames on the table and slipped them into a sturdy hardcover notebook she intended to carry with her.

One picture caught Rebecca's eye, showing Vance, Josette, and herself.

"Grandma," she said quietly, "may I keep this one?"

Josette handed it over without hesitation.

There was no longer any reason to hide the truth. In a matter of days, Josette would know everything anyway.

Rebecca took out a pair of scissors and cut Vance out, leaving only herself and Josette. Then she tucked the altered picture safely into her purse.

Josette watched the entire process in silence, then sighed.

"Let's go," Rebecca smiled.

"Okay." Josette took her hand, and they left the house together.

The driver got up from the chair, and Rebecca said, "I already told you. You're free to go. My grandma and I are going out to eat."

The driver was at a loss, watching them leave. Vance's order was to guard the house, and now he didn't know what to do.

He hesitated for a while, then pulled out his phone to make a call.

"They went out to eat?" Vance answered, sounding as though the explanation made perfect sense.

Rebecca was acting difficult now. Spending time with Josette might ease her anger.

"Just stay there and keep an eye on the house," he instructed. "Don't let anyone else inside."

He assumed they would return after dinner. He even sent Rebecca a message, asking where they were eating, so he could come pick them up later.

But only a red exclamation mark popped up. That was when he remembered she had blocked him. He tried calling her, but no one answered. He tried texting her, but no reply came.

“She’s still angry,” he muttered to himself. “Fine. I’ll wait for them at the village entrance.”

“I’m not judging, but Rebecca is out of line,” Aiden complained. “You need to put your foot down. She’s not going to starve without you, yet here she is throwing tantrums.”

“Why rush back at all?” Lucas chimed in. “We’re having a good time here. Today is supposed to be a celebration. Cathy just moved into her new place.”

Vance exhaled heavily. “I have to go. There are some family issues. I’m worried about her grandmother.”

Catherine lifted her glass with a gentle smile. “Go if you have to. Josette has always been so kind to you. It’s only right that you look after her. We can drink together anytime. And thank you again for preparing the new house for me.”

“Drive safely,” Catherine said with a smile.

But inside, she was cursing that meddling old woman.

She had already beaten Rebecca again and again. Yet now Rebecca’s grandmother was stepping in, trying to steal Vance’s attention.

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When Vance pulled up outside Josette’s house, only the driver remained.

“Where are they?” he asked with a frown.

The driver sprang to attention. “Mrs. Bradford said she went out to dine with her grandmother, sir.”

Vance stared at him, seriously considering whether this man was worth keeping on payroll.

“I already knew that,” he sulked. “You reported it.”

The driver blinked. His expression clearly said, “Then why are you asking me again?”

Vance rubbed his temples. “Are they still not back yet?”

The driver scratched his head, looking even more lost. The answer was so obvious it was almost painful. His boss seemed a little slow today.

Vance understood that look and found himself speechless. He started to wonder where they had gone for dinner. Somehow, Rebecca had gone off the radar, and he was clueless.

Aiden’s earlier taunt echoed in his mind. “You’re just too good to her. Cut off her money, freeze her cards, and see if she can still jump around like this.”

He laughed bitterly, unwilling to do that. She got crippled, saving him. That debt would never expire. The only currency he knew how to repay her with was money-large amounts of it.

He dialed her again and again, but no one answered. Then he tried Josette, but her phone was powered off.

He sighed, texting Rebecca: [You two still at dinner?]

Still no reply.

Out of options, he called Nancy, then remembered that she was still in the hospital.

He got back into the car, ready to head home.

The driver hurried after him. “Sir, where should I go?”

“Stay put.” Vance started the engine. “If they return, call me immediately.”

On the way home, he received a call from Aiden.

“Did you pay up? Picked them up yet? When are you coming back?”

“I’m not coming back. You guys enjoy yourselves.”

“What’s wrong? Something happened?”

“Nothing. I’m just tired.”

“Alright. We’re heading over to Cathy’s new place. If you change your mind, come by.”

“Okay.”

Vance hung up and guided the car down into the underground garage.

For five years, he had walked this short distance from parking space to elevator, yet he had always felt an invisible wall pressing against his chest, demanding that he summon the willpower to push through.

That night, the weight somehow felt lighter. Probably because he knew the apartment would be empty.

The elevator rose smoothly. The moment the fingerprint lock disengaged and warm light spilled into the hallway, the tension in his heart eased.

He chuckled at his unreasonable anxiety. “Where else would she go? She always comes back here.”

“Rebecca?” he called out from the entryway.

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From the bedroom, she poked her head out. “Oh, you’re back.”

There wasn’t a trace of anger on her face. He confirmed it was all his overthinking. Just like Aiden had said, she couldn’t survive without him.

A dancer who could no longer dance. What else was left for her?

“When did you get home?” he asked, walking toward her. “I called and texted, but you didn’t answer.”

“Didn’t hear the phone,” she answered, still folding clothes.

“With Nancy still in the hospital, we should bring in temporary help. You don’t have to do all this yourself,” he said, loosening his tie.

“I’m not helpless,” Rebecca said simply. “These are small tasks.”

“Where is Josette?” He noticed her absence.

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“My parents stressed her out,” Rebecca replied. “She wanted to stay away for a while. Out of sight, out of mind. After dinner, I bought her a ticket to visit an old friend out of town and have some fun.”

“That’s good.” Vance nodded. “But what about our family trip? When is she coming back? Should we wait for her?”

She was surprised that he still remembered the trip plan.

“We’ll see,” she answered vaguely.

A trip was indeed coming up, but it was her trip, having nothing to do with him.

Vance watched as she continued sorting clothes. “You’re packing quite a lot.”

“Switching out the autumn and winter things for summer,” she replied smoothly.

Of course, she would not tell him the truth: nearly everything that she couldn’t take away was already listed for sale on eBay. Anything that found a buyer in the next few days would be gone. Whatever remained on the final day would be collected by rag pickers.

Her phone chimed just then. A buyer was inquiring about a coat. She reached for it, but Vance grabbed it fast.

“eBay? Buying or selling?” he asked, unable to see the details.

“You use eBay?” She tried to take the phone back.

“Of course, I do. Let me see,” he insisted.

Catherine had once shown him second-hand bag listings on eBay, saying they were such steals. But naturally, he wouldn’t let her buy anything used. He had immediately bought her brand-new versions instead.

The memory felt bitter now that Rebecca had reclaimed almost every gift he had ever given Catherine.

On impulse, he lifted the phone to Rebecca’s face, unlocked it with Face ID, and saw the message. 2

A buyer was asking the price of a particular coat.

His eyebrows shot upward. “Did I short you? You need to sell your clothes now?”

She rolled her eyes and snatched the phone back. “You wouldn’t understand. I have far too many clothes and not enough space. I’m clearing out the pieces I no longer wear.”

“So, you’re telling me the closet is too small?” He glanced around the walk-in wardrobe. “It is a little tight. But didn’t we already purchase a new house?”

“I’m never going to wear the ones I don’t like anyway,” she explained. “Might as well sell them at a good price to someone who actually needs them.”

The buyer made a counteroffer, and she accepted immediately.

Vance frowned, then nodded. “That’s pretty eco-friendly.”

She ignored him and kept typing. The buyer paid soon enough.

Vance watched the transaction complete in real time. “You just closed the deal? Just like that?”

She nodded, putting down her phone.

He was fascinated. “This is actually kind of interesting. You’re running a small resale business right from home. Though if everyone did what you’re doing, they’d go broke.”

He chuckled at his own joke, but she just stared at him.

“What? I’m not stopping you. Sell whatever you want.”

“A shame.”

“Why? If you feel bad about parting with them, keep them.”

“That’s not what I meant. It’s a shame that used clothes, jewelry, and handbags can be sold, but no one would buy a used man. Terrible return on investment.” (2)

“What are you implying?”

She smiled and said nothing.

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“You’re trying to sell me off now?” Vance stepped closer and pinched her cheek. “Got addicted to second- hand sales?”

“Too bad no one’s making an offer,” Rebecca sighed theatrically. “I’d happily sell you to Catherine, but I’m fairly certain she wouldn’t pay me a cent.”

He gave a short, humorless laugh and tightened his grip just enough to leave a red mark on her skin.

“You’ve really gotten good at talking nonsense lately,” he said.

The pressure hurt. From the darkening expression on his face, she could tell he was genuinely angry. And she understood exactly why.

Catherine was his beloved woman, and Rebecca had just taken back everything he had given Catherine, worth millions. He had to be seething inside.

“Stop imagining things,” he said in a low, tight voice. “Cathy and I are not like what you think. I’ve told you a million times. You will always be Mrs. Bradford.”

He clearly had no desire to continue the conversation. Without waiting for a reply, he turned and walked straight into the bathroom to shower.

Rebecca had even less interest in prolonging the argument. She had only four days left and a long list of things to handle. Thankfully, she had more than enough money and was no longer afraid.

She allowed herself a small, bitter smile. Whatever else these five years of marriage had been, Vance had never been stingy when it came to money.

Another notification lit up her phone. Someone was inquiring about a limited-edition winter coat.

This was the only coat Vance had ever personally selected for her.

That year, his father had returned to the country for Christmas. Vance normally refused to set foot in the old family house, always saying, “They’re all distant relatives. What’s the point?”

But when his father came home, he had to go.

Rebecca had long suspected that he secretly wanted to go. He was eager to stand in front of the entire clan, especially his father, and demonstrate that he could thrive without their support.

To look the part, he had personally selected their outfits. Hers was this ridiculously expensive coat. She had never imagined it would one day appear on eBay, even at a giveaway price.

The buyer countered: [$400.]

Rebecca: [Sure.]

The buyer: [For real? This cheap? Is it fake?]

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Rebecca: [100% authentic. Comes with original receipt and all authenticity certificates.]

The buyer: [I remember there was a matching men's version. Do you have that one too?]

Rebecca: [Yeah.]

The buyer: [I want both pieces. How about $600?]

Rebecca: [Deal.]

The buyer sent a string of question marks: [Girl, you're deciding so fast that I'm getting suspicious. Is it really authentic? Why are you so eager to sell?]

Rebecca: [It's genuine. Honestly, these are just things I no longer need. Getting rid of junk feels good, right?]

Afraid that the buyer would misunderstand, she added: [I don't mean the coat itself is defective. I mean, it no longer has any use in my life.]

The buyer: [Can you send a video?]

Rebecca: [One second.]

Her coat was easy to find since she had just packed it. After filming and sending the video, she started searching for the matching coat. It took a while, but she eventually found it.

Just as she started to shoot a video, Vance's cold voice came from behind her. "What are you doing in my closet?"

She jumped, nearly dropping the phone. Vance stood in the doorway wearing only a bathrobe, his hair still dripping wet from the shower.

Water trailed slowly down his forehead, making his dark eyes look even sharper and more distant than usual. He asked, "Why are you taking my clothes?"

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“Someone wants to buy the matching set,” Rebecca answered steadily. “I’m just showing her what the pair looks like together.”

“Matching set?” His voice rose noticeably. “You’re welcome to sell anything of yours. You do not have permission to touch my things.”

“It’s a couple’s set,” she explained with a small shrug. “The buyer wants both. Without your coat, mine won’t sell.”

“Rebecca!” His anger flared.

He had been angry far more frequently lately.

“What’s the problem? You haven’t worn it in years,” she reasoned. “Giving it to someone who will actually use it is just sensible recycling. Don’t worry. I’ll split the proceeds with you.”

He snorted, pushed her gently aside, reached into the closet for fresh clothes, and spoke in a low, dark tone. “Cathy and the others are having a gathering tonight. Despite their repeated attempts to keep me there, I came back to spend the evening with you. And now you...”

He stopped mid-sentence, turned, and walked out to change in the living room. Rebecca heard him on the phone a moment later.

“Hey, Catherine. Where are you guys now? Yes, I’m heading over shortly. Do you need anything? Dessert? What kind? Cheese tea? Which shop? Understood.”

He headed out, and Rebecca returned to her conversation with the buyer. Her fingers, still wrapped in gauze, made typing slow and awkward.

The buyer was local, and the shipping address was the front desk of a hotel.

Rebecca: [No problem. I’ll ship everything tomorrow.]

She finished packing the items scheduled to go out the next day, booked the courier pickup, and then made a video call to Josette.

Seeing her grandmother safe and settled eased her anxiety. She showered, climbed into bed, and started a movie when her phone lit up with incoming messages.

The number was unknown, but the words were painfully familiar.

[You blocked everyone, including Vance, because you can’t handle reality?]

[In that case, why don’t you just divorce him already? Stop clinging to him like a leech.]

[What can you give Vance besides embarrassment and trouble? Can you even sleep with him? Can you give him children? If you can’t fulfill the most basic duties of a wife, what good are you?]

The phrase “sleep with him” pricked the old wound. Not because he hadn’t touched her in five years.

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That pain had long since scarred over.

Now she felt only relief. A child would have made leaving him infinitely more complicated. What truly stung was the knowledge that he had shared their most private issues with Catherine.

The hurt lasted only a heartbeat before it faded. After all, this wasn’t the first time he had done such things. Before, he had told Aiden about his lack of interest in her.

They could gossip behind her back as much as they liked, but coming at her directly with these messages? She would not accept it.

The texts continued to arrive in rapid succession.

[Guess where we are right now? In the new house Vance bought me! And even more expensive bags and watches. Guess who bought them? This time, you won’t be able to take them from me.]

It was followed by photos of the new house, new bags, the four of them drinking, and a large cake with icing that read: New Home for Cathy.

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Catherine: [Oh, have you tried this cheese tea yet?]

She sent a screenshot of her latest post, captioned: [Thank my darling for driving 40 kilometers to get me the trendiest dessert! While they discuss business, I quietly enjoy my sweet treat.]

Rebecca had decided to walk away cleanly. She would wish them well from a great distance and begin her new life with the money given by Vance.

As long as she avoided catastrophic mistakes, the rest of her life would be materially secure. She had genuinely intended to let them go in peace, knowing that once she left, Vance would take excellent care of Catherine. That outcome was never in doubt.

By then, she would be living her own life. There would be no reason to wrestle with people who had already proven themselves toxic.

So, why was Catherine being so brazen? Why provoke her repeatedly and so openly? Vance promised to rein in Catherine, only to break it in a matter of days.

Couldn't he wait even a little?

But since Catherine dared to taunt her, Rebecca guessed the purchases had not gone directly through Vance's accounts. He wasn't foolish enough to leave a paper trail. The money had likely passed through an indirect channel.

Her fingers tightened around the phone. She truly had no time left to waste on these two.

Opening Catherine's homepage, she began methodically screenshotting and screen-recording every single post.

Rebecca: [Don't you think you're going too far? You walked away from him back then, and he married me. Now you're back, stirring up trouble. What are you trying to achieve?]

The response arrived almost instantly, every word dripping with smug triumph.

Catherine: [So what? Vance loves me. No matter how far I travel or how long I disappear, I will always be the person closest to his heart.]

Rebecca: [But he has been my husband for five years now. Our marriage is licensed and protected by law.]

Catherine: [Ha! Hug your little certificate tightly. Vance belongs to me. That's the only fact that matters.]

Rebecca: [What you're doing is adultery. It's morally wrong, and you'll never be able to live openly.]

Catherine: [Adultery? We have been open for years. Back then, everyone at the company treated me as Mrs. Bradford. All his friends respect me. And anyway, he will divorce you sooner or later. Then everything will be legitimate.]

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Rebecca: [Aren't you afraid I'll show these messages to him?]

Catherine: [Go ahead. He understands me completely and will never blame me.]

Gathering enough evidence, Rebecca stopped responding, but Catherine wasn't finished.

Catherine: [Why the silence? Did I strike a nerve?]

Rebecca: [I'm furious right now. How can you be so shameless?]

Catherine fired the classic line: [The truly shameless person is the woman who refuses to release a marriage when she is not loved. Vance does not love you. He only loves me.]

Rebecca closed the chat window, done playing her game.

Of course, she wasn't going to show any of this to Vance. It was pointless, with only two possible outcomes.

First: just as Catherine predicted, he wouldn't blame her at all and would instead invent every possible excuse for her behavior.

Rebecca had no interest in hearing them.

Second: by some miracle, he would suddenly develop both conscience and clarity, see Catherine's true nature, and come crawling back to her.

That scenario would be far more troublesome.

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So, it was better to let them dance on whatever thin ice they chose.

Rebecca closed two more deals before exhaustion finally pulled her under. She fell asleep thinking about tomorrow's shipments.

Vance didn't come home that night.

When she woke up the next morning, a new message waited from an unknown number-sent at 2 a.m.

It was a photo of Vance asleep, asleep, bare-chested. Catherine, wearing silky lingerie, rested her head intimately against his shoulder.

Rebecca immediately checked Catherine's latest post. The same photograph appeared, with Vance's face blurred.

The caption read: [Watching you sleep never gets old. My boy, I could look at you like this for a thousand years.]

The Hermès bag, the Hermès table lamp, the Chanel dress... None of those details had been hidden. The comments overflowed with envy that she had such a rich and loving husband.

Catherine replied in full "wife" persona: [I'm just lucky. We've known each other since high school. It's been over ten years now. He started his own company, and I don't work. He can't afford me.]

It was pure, curated fantasy, arousing even more envy.

Rebecca remembered a line she had read: [On the internet, everyone gets to decide who they are.]

Catherine was clearly thriving in the role of perfect, adored wife.

Rebecca quietly screen-recorded the entire post and every comment beneath it. Then she got up, arranged the packages, and marked each one as shipped.

When Vance walked through the front door, the courier was just arriving to collect the towering stack of boxes.

He froze in the doorway, staring. "All of this... is the clothing you sold?"

"Yes," she answered evenly, helping the courier attach the shipping labels with her bandaged fingers.

Vance's eyes narrowed sharply. "What exactly are you doing?"

"Clearing out unused stuff." She shrugged, but something didn't sit right with him.

"I can see that. But... are you emptying the entire wardrobe?"

"Out with the old, in with the new."

The phrase fit her situation perfectly.

“You want to buy new clothes?”

“Something like that.”

She finished labeling the last box, thanked the courier, and watched him carry everything away.

“I’ll pay the shipping fee through the app later.”

“Got it.”

The courier hauled the mountain of boxes away.

Vance closed the door behind him. “Even if you want new things, you don’t have to sell everything you own.”

Rebecca looked at him, noting that he was wearing an entirely different outfit from yesterday. A man who changed clothes while he was out? That said everything.

She gave a knowing smile. “You changed into new clothes. Who doesn’t like new things?”

He paused, looking down. “Oh. I got drunk at Cathy’s place last night. My clothes got dirty, so I changed.”

“Alright,” she hummed, heading into the room.

“It wasn’t just me. Aiden and Lucas were there, too.”

“Mm hmm.”

“I couldn’t drive home like that.”

“Uh huh.”

She walked into the closet to change clothes and reached to close the door. Vance caught it before it shut. “What’s with the attitude?”

She exhaled slowly. “What attitude?”

“You keep making these little sounds. What do they mean?”

“They mean I heard you. And I’m keeping my promise. Two words.”

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Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 190

Vance studied Rebecca's face for a while, then relaxed a little. "You're really not angry?"

"Nope. Every time I say I'm not angry, you refuse to believe me."

"About Cathy..."

"I know. She's the most important person in your life. She was the light that appeared during your darkest moment. She helped you when you had nothing else. She stayed by your grandmother's side during her final days. If someone like that existed in my life, I would treasure them, too. And now that she is going through a difficult time, of course, you should take care of her."

She recited his usual speech like a textbook. He heaved a sigh of relief, buying it.

"Good that you understand."

The sheer absurdity of the moment made her laugh quietly.

"I need to change clothes. Please step out."

Only three days remained. The calendar felt tighter with every sunrise, and she wanted to see his face less and less.

"Going somewhere?"

"The clinic."

"I'll drive you."

She considered it for a second. "Alright."

There was no point in raising his suspicions yet.

She changed into something light and comfortable, picked up her bag, and left the apartment with him. In the car, she noticed that the plaque had returned to its place.

“Oh, it’s back up there.”

“Yeah. Catherine said she hopes it, together with my grandma’s blessing, will protect me.’

“Neat.”

He glanced sideways, checking her expression. “If only you had been this understanding from the very beginning…”

“I’ve always been understanding,” she replied quietly,

She had lost count of how many times she had silently wished them to stick to each other forever.

He reached back and stroked her hair. “Good.”

She flinched in disgust, remembering the photo from last night. The touch felt contaminated, but she held it in since only three days remained before her departure.

Arriving at the clinic, he started to get out to help her from the car, but she quickly opened the door.

“It’s fine. I can manage. You can go now.”

“I’m not the plague. Can’t wait to get rid of me?”

Or what? A treasure? She kept the thought to herself and waved him off.

Inside, she received her therapy session and skipped rehabilitation. It couldn’t continue anymore.

Afterward, she bought two takeout meals from a nearby shop. Rather than calling a ride, she stood on the sidewalk until an empty taxi passed by.

She took it straight to the hotel where Josette was staying and rode the elevator to the correct floor. At the door, she swiped the key card and opened it.

To her surprise, Vivian was still there.

“You didn’t leave?” she asked, closing the door behind her.

To prevent her parents from tracking them down, Rebecca had deliberately avoided booking the room under her own name or Josette’s.

She had gone to Vivian’s store and asked for help registering the room under Vivian’s identification. She had assumed Vivian would leave afterward.

Apparently not.

“I was worried,” Vivian explained with an easy grin. “The room is booked in my name anyway. I figured I might as well enjoy a nice hotel for a couple of nights. Not a bad deal at all.”

“You’ve already done so much for us,” Rebecca smiled, not expecting this level of kindness.

They had met through luxury resale, essentially strangers at first. Yet their paths somehow kept crossing, and she had a feeling that it was just the beginning.