

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 191

Vivian shook her head quickly. “No worries. We’re friends, after all. And we’ve got...”

“Alright,” Rebecca cut in with a warm smile. “Meeting like this was fate, pure and simple.”

What was left unsaid was that Vivian had come out ahead on the deal. Rebecca had paid her and her boyfriend a hefty sum for their help, and now Wade had landed an excellent job.

“Don’t worry,” Vivian reassured her. “I’ll stay at the hotel with Josette these next few days, and I already bought her plane ticket. You can swing by and pick her up when it’s time.”

Rebecca nodded, then opened the takeout containers and called them over to eat. After the meal, Vivian excused herself with an errand to run, leaving them alone to talk.

“Grandma, don’t worry about a thing while you’re here,” Rebecca said softly. “In three days, we’ll leave for Arelmoor. There wasn’t enough time to sort out your visa, so you’ll stay in an apartment there for a month. Once the paperwork is ready, we’ll go and reunite with Aunt Kaitlyn.”

She had already asked Lauren to line up a furnished apartment. Once they were ready, they would head straight there. That way, her parents couldn’t find or hurt Josette again.

Vivian returned to the hotel in the afternoon. Rebecca said goodbye to Josette. Her heart felt unbearably heavy as she drove away, heading to Emmett’s company.

She was born into a family that didn’t love her. From childhood to adulthood, she had never once felt her parents’ warmth. Still, she had never imagined she would one day have to turn her back on them.

Everyone assumed she was just a cripple living off Vance’s money, but because she was kept at home and had nothing else to do, her sensitivity was sharper than others’.

Emmett’s company was funded by Vance. It served as a major supply pipeline for several of Vance’s enterprises. In other words, it existed only because Vance kept it alive.

Rebecca had been married to Vance for five years and had always been looked down on. She carried shame and walked on eggshells every single day.

Her family was a huge part of that shame. Ever since the wedding, they had latched onto him like leeches, demanding houses, cars, cash, and funds for Emmett's company.

They grew fat and happy on his dime. Because of their insatiable greed, she had lived in constant fear inside that pressure cooker, terrified they would drag Vance into some disaster,

That had pushed her to stay cautious, quietly watching Emmett's operation from the sidelines. With her bad leg and no real power, she couldn't march in and investigate openly.

She had found nothing until recently, when a sudden breakthrough had landed in her lap. But before she could act on it, they had stormed Josette's house. Now she could do it to her advantage.

This was her first visit to Emmett's company. Emmett had no clue she was coming.

His outfit was small and had none of the strict rules, so she easily navigated to his office and pushed the door open.

Emmett was all over his girlfriend and never expected anyone to barge in. He spun around, cursing, "Who the hell has the balls to..."

He caught himself, but his tone still lacked respect. "What are you doing here?"

After the recent blow-up at Josette's place, he now hated her even more.

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Emmett's girlfriend tugged his sleeve from behind.

Emmett swallowed his temper and waved Rebecca toward a chair. She stayed standing, curious to see how far he would push it.

"This is your first meeting with Marie, right?" he said. "Meet my sister, Rebecca-the CEO's wife. And this is my girlfriend, Marie Olsen."

"Nice to meet you, Rebecca," Marie said sweetly, her eyes glued to Rebecca's designer bag and clothes.

Rebecca had kept to herself for five years, but she wasn't stupid. That naked, greedy stare was impossible to miss.

Marie's smile was obsequious. "Your bag and outfit are high-end stuff."

Rebecca felt a flicker of surprise. With Vance propping up his business these past two years, Emmett could easily afford some luxuries.

As far as she knew, he had skimmed plenty of money he had no right to.

"They're fine," she answered coolly.

Marie yanked his shirt. Emmett got the message and announced smoothly, "This is your first meeting, so do you have any gifts for Marie? Nothing crazy. Just one of those bags would be perfect."

Marie beamed behind him, her eyes sparkling with anticipation. Rebecca stared at them, stunned by their big nerves.

"Come on," Emmett whined. "Don't let her get the wrong idea that my family doesn't like her."

"Do I look like someone who does?" Rebecca snorted.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Emmett protested, his eyes bloodshot.

God knew what he had been up to all night.

"I mean, I don't like her," she announced, lifting her chin.

"Emmett..." Marie whined, shaking his arm.

Emmett's face twisted with humiliation. He jabbed a finger at Rebecca's nose. "What is your problem? I call you sister only for Vance's sake. Don't act like you are hot shit!"

That was the upbringing talking. Because the family had never regarded Rebecca as important, he felt free to trash her.

"I didn't come here for a family reunion," she said, uninterested in their game. "We need to talk about Josette's house."

"Josette's house? You really think you're getting any of it?" Emmett laughed mockingly. "Let me break it down for you. No matter how they split things, that house belongs to Dad. Aunt Kaitlyn has long gone abroad and changed her nationality. How does she even get a claim on the property? Keep dreaming!"

Seeing her stone-faced silence, he smirked, “Dad promises that after the redevelopment, all the cash and property will go to me. You won’t get a dime or a single brick. Station as many people as you want. It won’t help.”

She stayed calm. “I want you to convince Dad to walk away from that house and every penny of the redevelopment money.”

He blinked, then exploded with laughter. “Are you daydreaming? Wake up. Walk away from it and give it to you? Marie, what do you say? Isn’t she losing it? Hahaha!”

Marie dropped the shy act. “Cheap and greedy. No wonder Mr. Bradford doesn’t like you.”

Rebecca paused, wondering how Marie even knew about that.

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“Did he tell you?” Rebecca demanded.

“Didn’t have to,” Marie scoffed. “Everyone knows that. He only spoils his first love. So enviable.”

“Enviably? Go ahead and try it yourself,” Rebecca said coolly.

“Try what?” Marie stammered, her eyes darting.

“Try getting Mr. Bradford to spoil you,” Rebecca smirked.

Marie’s face flushed crimson. “What nonsense are you talking about?”

Emmett lost it. “Watch your mouth, Rebecca!”

“Mine’s clean. Can’t say the same for what’s inside some people’s heads.” Rebecca pulled a stack of photos from her bag and slapped them on the desk. “This guy... Tell me you don’t recognize him.”

He snatched the pictures, his color draining. “What the hell? Did you stalk me?”

“Didn’t need to. You weren’t exactly subtle,” Rebecca said, her voice slow and deliberate. “Morten. That’s his name, right?”

The photos, taken from all angles, showed Emmett dining, getting into a car, and walking around with a middle-aged man.

“So what? Can’t I have friends?” Emmett’s lips had gone white.

“You think I’d show up without proof?” Rebecca grinned. “Of course, he’s your friend. Otherwise, why would you trust him so much, working together to rip off Vance’s money?”

“You’re lying!” Emmett’s face turned ghostly.

“Listen. I need you to go home or call Mom and Dad over right now. Sign papers to give up Josette’s house and all the redevelopment money. Get it notarized,” Rebecca demanded. “Otherwise, I’ll hand over the evidence of you and Morten running that kickback scheme and selling substandard goods straight to the police. Then you can wait for jail time.”

Emmett’s hand shook around the photos. “H-How did you know? Are you really my sister? How can you do this to me?”

“That doesn’t matter. Don’t commit a crime if you can’t take the time. Decide now-whether to go home and sign the papers or bring them here.”

“No, I can’t. I don’t want prison, sister.”

He shook his head wildly, calling her sister when he was pushed to the brink, but Rebecca didn’t budge.

“Then call them. Mom and Dad pamper you. They’ll agree.”

“But...”

Devastated, he swayed on his feet.

“Emmett...” Marie steadied him, snapping at Rebecca. “What kind of sister are you? Everyone else looks out for their families, and you backstab them instead of funding them. You don’t deserve to be his sister, you heartless bitch!”

“Whoever wants the job can have it,” Rebecca countered.

Her family had never treated her as their own, and she didn’t have to show them mercy.

She gave the ultimatum, her eyes fixed on Emmett. “I don’t have time to waste. Call them or go to prison.”

“No, I don’t want either,” he cried, collapsing to the ground.

“Alright. I’ll call them.” Rebecca pulled out her phone.

Just then, a man’s voice came from the doorway. “No need. They’re already here.”

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The newcomer was none other than Vance, accompanied by his driver and several imposing men in black suits, whom Rebecca didn't recognize.

Her parents shuffled between them, looking dejected with their heads down.

Vance wore a stern expression. In the past, he had always played the generous son-in-law, smiling and saying yes to everything.

People had started to forget that a man who could carve out an empire in the brutal business world couldn't possibly be soft.

Last time at Josette's place, he had shown a hint of teeth. Today, it was a real show of how intimidating he could be.

Laughing or yelling showed emotion, which wasn't really that terrifying. People were awe-inspiring when they were calm and blank.

Because no one could guess what storm was brewing under that still surface.

The second he stepped into the office with that blank expression, the air seemed to freeze. He walked straight to Rebecca and took her hand.

Emmett held his breath and bowed his head, too terrified to meet Vance's eyes. At the same time, those black-suited men guided Soren and Adeline until the four of them were grouped.

"Vance, what is going on here?" Soren asked in a shaky, placating voice.

Vance raised a hand, and the driver handed him a thick folder. He tossed it on the desk and pointed at Emmett. "Read it."

Emmett glanced at it and closed his eyes, knowing he was finished. He crawled over to Vance, begging bitterly, "I'm sorry. I made a terrible mistake. It won't happen again, I promise."

Rebecca glanced over and saw ironclad proof of everything she had accused Emmett of. It looked like

Vance had known the whole time.

Actually, her own information was too thin. She had only been guessing.

It was a pure coincidence that Wade had gotten hired as a department manager at one of Vance's companies, and that department happened to work with Emmett's outfit.

He had spotted irregularities but lacked hard proof, limited by his clearance. So, he had tailed Emmett, confirmed his suspicions, and told Rebecca.

Today, she had come to bluff, knowing well that Emmett was nothing but a coward with no capability or experience. Just a psychological play had a high chance of getting the truth out of him.

She had never expected Vance to be running the same play, only with real evidence. And he made the same demand that they give up the house.

Still clueless, Soren wailed, "What, are you really eyeing this tiny amount? You could shake out more cash from your pockets than the whole redevelopment payout."

Vance's expression remained stern. The message was clear: "No need to explain. Just choose. Give up the house or let Emmett go to prison."

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Emmett saw Soren's hesitation and panicked further.

"Dad, you can't abandon me," he pleaded. "I don't want prison. Please!"

Soren glanced warily at Rebecca and Vance. "Son, begging me won't help. I've got no power or money."

Feeling sorry for Emmett, Adeline glared. "Just sign that waiver!"

"I-I can't," Soren stammered.

"That's our son!" Adeline screamed. "You're really going to watch him rot in prison?"

Her defiance annoyed Soren, who was used to ruling the house. He shot back, “So what if he does a few years? Do you even know the amount of that redevelopment money? He couldn’t earn it in ten years!”

Emmett broke down. “Dad, you always said I was your favorite.”

“So what? Can you hand me tens of millions?”

“You old bastard! I’ll kill you!” Adeline fished out a pair of scissors and lunged.

“You’re insane!” Soren bolted, only to fall to the ground.

Rebecca saw what happened: Emmett had tripped him. Adeline sat on top of him, holding the scissors at his throat.

“Are you signing or not?”

“You’re crazy!”

“If Emmett goes to prison, I’ll show you real shit and go down with you! I’ll rot there together with him!”

She pressed harder. The scissors pricked his skin and drew blood. He screamed in pain, but she was relentless.

“Sign it!”

“Okay, I’ll sign.”

He finally folded, daunted by her unhinged state.

“Don’t think about going back on it!” She pushed the blades deeper. “Unless you never come back to Soliaridge or close your eyes. If anything happens to Emmett, watch your head! The kitchen knife at home is a lot sharper than these scissors.”

He pictured her hacking bones in the kitchen and shuddered. “N-No, I won’t. I’ll do it right away.”

Vance and Rebecca watched from the sidelines as the three tore into each other over money.

Everyone else probably just saw entertainment, but Rebecca felt an ache deep in her chest.

Adeline never valued her. Emmett was trash, and Soren was greedy. She was aware of that, but Adeline’s outburst still shocked her.

It turned out Adeline had so much motherly love that she would risk her life. Yet Rebecca had never received a drop of it.

Vance stood up, instructing the guards, “Watch them finish the paperwork, take them to the notary, and bring me the contract.”

He then took Rebecca’s hand. “Let’s go.”

Marie, who had witnessed the entire process, lost herself in thought. Her eyes were fixed on the hand resting on Rebecca’s shoulder.

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Vance kept his arm around Rebecca until she was safe in the car. He slid behind the wheel, his face clouding over.

“Were you out of your mind?” he scolded.

Rebecca blinked, confused about which line she had crossed this time. Vance caught his harsh tone and took a deep breath to calm down.

“How did you find out what Emmett was doing?” he asked.

Rebecca naturally would not give away Wade. She lied, “I know him, but I didn’t have the full picture. It was just guessing and bluffing.”

Vance snorted, drumming his fingers on the steering wheel-a sign of his frustration.

She continued, “I know you’re furious. He stole your funds...”

“Shut up!” he snapped, boiling over.

“You can decide how to make it right,” Rebecca finished anyway. “Send him to prison if that’s what it takes.”

“I’m pissed right now. Don’t talk to me about that,” he growled, struggling to control his temper.

“Well...” She paused.

Rationally, things should be kept separate. Emotionally, she wasn’t surprised that he was so angry.

Emmett’s company had been funded by him from the very beginning. Yet Emmett had betrayed him by acting as a white-gloved middleman, draining money from the company.

Anyone in his shoes would be furious. But anger wouldn’t solve anything.

She continued, “No matter how mad you are, we have to handle it. Tell me what you want done.”

She didn’t have much time left in Soliaridge. Better to end it fast.

Vance turned and pinned her with a sharp look. “You think I’m angry about the money?”

She blinked. What else could it be?

His laugh was cold and mocking. “Then the last five years were a complete waste.”

She didn’t quite follow. “If you have something to say, say it straight. Don’t beat around the bush.”

His temper flared. “You know exactly what they are like, and you still walked in there alone? If I hadn’t shown up at Josette’s the other day, they would have snapped your hands!”

She paused, surprised by his concern about her safety.

“You found out about the problem and didn’t come to me first,” he growled, raising his voice. “You ran straight to Emmett instead. What were you thinking?”

Her ears rang. “Is it really that big a deal? I went there with a plan.”

“A plan? Are you bigger than him? Faster? Stronger? If he decided to beat you or shut you up permanently, could you get away?” he yelled like a furious lion, ready to strike anything in reach.

She had never seen him like this.

“I was covered.” She pointed outside, and several men hidden around the building stepped into view.

Vance glanced over, his face still tight. “Who are they?”

“The guys I hired,” she replied. “They were stationed around Emmett’s office. If anything had gone wrong, they would have rushed in.”

Since she was about to start a new life, she wasn’t walking into anything blind.

The fire in his eyes cooled a fraction. “I didn’t see them when I walked in.”

“They’re ex-military. Professionals,” she explained.

She had asked her complex security for recommendations on hiring protection. The guard had hooked her up with his old service buddies.

He exhaled. “You’re not that dull after all.”

She ignored the jab and reached for the door. He quickly locked it.

“Where are you going?”

“Paying them, of course. They don’t work for free.”

“How much?”

“They’re honest guys. Quoted me low. I added extra.”

Unlocking the doors, he got out and walked over. Through the window, she watched him pay them, chat a little, shake hands with those people, and wave goodbye.

When he returned, she asked curiously, “What did you say to them?”

“Nothing.” He started the engine. “Let’s go home. They’ll finish the rest of things.”

“By the way, when did you find out Emmett’s scheme?” she asked, amazed at the timing.

He didn’t answer, but she caught on. “You knew way before this, didn’t you?”

“Yeah.” He nodded, pulling out of the lot.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” she pressed.

That was her family. He should have come to her first, even if it was just one more humiliating thing for her to swallow.

He glanced at her. “It was under control. Besides...”

“Besides what?” She waited.

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“He’s your brother,” Vance replied curtly, stepping on the gas.

“But he...” Rebecca started, eager to say that Emmett was never reliable.

She swallowed her words, seeing no point.

For years, her family had shown Vance nothing but greed. She had advised him countless times not to indulge them, but he had always responded, “They’re your family.”

Back then, she had believed that they would grow old together and that these problems could be fixed slowly. He meant well, and this was his way of repaying her.

Catherine’s return blew every buried landmine sky-high. But it was better this way.

Before she left, Vance and her family would have their final, clean break.

“Don’t stress about Emmett,” he said while driving. “It’s all under control. Doesn’t affect me.”

She glanced at him, and he chuckled, his eyes on the road. “What? Don’t you believe me? Morten Coleman and he thought they were smart, trying to suck me dry. They were unaware of my grander plan.”

She didn’t know the details of his plan, but since there was no damage, she felt at ease. She really didn’t want any more messy debts or connections with him.

“If Adeline hadn’t lost it, Soren might not have caved,” she mused. “What would you have dealt with that?”

“What about you? What would you have done?” he asked back.

She sighed, having one plan that wasn’t quite pretty.

He continued, “Soren is drowning in gambling debts. That’s why he’s so desperate for cash. If he had refused, I would have just invited those debtors over.”

Her eyes widened, and he winked. “Same play you had in mind?”

She stayed silent. That was indeed her plan.

She had known about Soren’s gambling habit since she was a child. Back then, she had split time between home and Josette’s place.

Soren had even pawned Adeline’s gold necklace for gambling money. When he lost, he’d come home drunk, screaming it was Adeline’s fault for not handing it over fast enough.

Once the jewelry ran out, he borrowed money from anyone who would lend it. Then one holiday, debt collectors showed up at their door.

Rebecca had pitied Adeline then, but Adeline only blamed her, complaining about how hard it was to raise two kids.

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She never wanted to revisit those memories, but they were real. She knew everything about Soren’s gambling.

“Pretty rotten family, huh?” she smiled bitterly, thinking of her childhood.

It was humiliating to lay it all out in front of Vance.

“Mine isn’t much better,” he answered. “None of it is on you.”

She looked out the window, her eyes stinging for the scared little girl she had once been.

“Don’t blame yourself for dragging me down,” he added. “You didn’t. You’re my wife, and I’ll always have your back.”

She shook her head, pushing the wave of bitterness down.

The car stopped suddenly. His hands reached out and gripped her shoulders. She didn’t turn.

“I’ve known about your family situation for 12 years,” he whispered. “There’s nothing to be ashamed of. We don’t choose where we were born. It’s not our fault.”

His grip tightened, as if he were trying to give her strength. Too bad these hands had held someone else. Without Catherine, things might have been as he claimed, that he would be her rock.

The sky he had held over her for five years might not have always been sunny, but at least he had tried. But the moment Catherine reappeared, these same hands shoved her into the abyss.

Now, even thinking of that name seemed to be dangerous.

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As the name crossed Rebecca's mind, Vance's phone rang.

"Vance..." Catherine's sugary voice came through.

He quickly slipped in his earpiece, his voice soft enough to melt. "Hey, Cathy."

Whatever Catherine said, he replied at once, "Okay, I'm on my way. Yeah. Want me to bring your favorite bubble tea? Done."

Rebecca listened, knowing the next thing out of his mouth would be: "Take a cab home. I've got something to do."

So, she sensibly opened the car door.

"Rebecca!" he called out, quickly getting out and blocking her.

She blinked, waiting for him to continue.

"Cathy planned to visit the seniors in the retirement center and bought too much stuff. She doesn't have a car, so I'm picking her up and going together with her."

She nodded. "Sounds nice."

"She used to volunteer at the hospital, helping out seniors," he explained. "She is always that kind."

She nodded again, fighting the urge to roll her eyes. "Yeah, great."

"Charity work is a good thing," he said seriously. "It's wonderful that she has that kind of heart."

“I never said it wasn’t,” she replied. “Haven’t I been agreeing the whole time?”

“Seriously?” He looked doubtful. “I thought you were being sarcastic.”

“I am serious.” Her smile widened. “Look in my eyes. Do they look mad?”

He studied her face for a while, then nodded. “I’ll drop you off somewhere easier to grab a cab.”

Just then, Soren and Emmett slinked out of the building like whipped dogs. She glanced at them and nodded, unwilling to hear their yelling.

Sure enough, the second she was back in the car, Soren started roaring. Someone must have hit him, because he then let out a pathetic yelp.

Vance glanced at her. “Want me to stop them?”

Rebecca numbly shook her head. This was nothing compared to what she had witnessed as a child.

After losing at the tables, Soren would get drunk, smash bottles, and hit Adeline. When Rebecca tried to intervene, Adeline would slap her and scream it was all her fault.

Vance’s phone rang with a call from one of the men he had brought earlier. He put it on speakerphone, and a loud voice came through. “Sir, everything is handled. We’re heading to the notary now.”

“Good. Bring me the certificate when it’s done.” Vance hung up. “It’s settled. No more problems. You and Josette can relax.”

“Thanks,” Rebecca said automatically, polite but distant.

He gave a small smile. “No worries.”

She nodded. “Yeah.”

“About Soren’s gambling debts... Just say the word, and I’ll clear them.”

“No need.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah. Adults should own their mistakes. He was like this 20 years ago and still hasn’t changed. No point helping. His life, his problem.”

“Alright.”

“Drop me off here. I’ll hail a cab.”

“Why don’t you come along to the retirement center?”

“No thanks. My mobility is limited. I’d just slow down your charity work.”

She figured he would eventually learn the truth about Catherine’s volunteer story. She was curious about his reaction then.

She would not reveal anything now and face his interception. Only three days remained. She didn’t want things to get complicated.

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Rebecca opened the car door and stepped out. Vance got out of the other side.

The moment her feet hit the pavement, a sweet voice came from a near distance. “Vance!”

It was Catherine. How was she everywhere?

Vance was surprised. “What are you doing here?”

“You said you’d bring me bubble tea, right? The only place on the way that has my favorite flavor is this mall, so I came here to wait,” she explained, smiling brightly. “I just wanted to see you sooner.”

Rebecca stood on the curb; her cab was four minutes away.

“Oh, Rebecca is here too?” Catherine gasped, pretending to just notice her presence. “I didn’t know.”

“Yeah, we just had something to handle,” Vance said, glancing behind her. “Where’s all the stuff you bought?”

“Oh, I couldn’t carry it, so I left everything at the supermarket entrance. We can grab it on the way.” Catherine bounced in front of him. “I came to pick you up.”

He chuckled with amusement. “You came to pick me up? Well, thank you.”

Rebecca kept her eyes on the traffic, pretending not to hear them, but his laugh was ridiculously loud.

Of course, when people liked someone, everything they did was adorable.

She smiled faintly and watched another minute tick off the wait. Now there were three minutes to go.

“Rebecca...” Catherine sidled up, and Rebecca tilted her head.

“I’m sorry for stealing Vance away,” Catherine said pitifully.

Rebecca didn’t understand this victim mentality. She just calmly brushed it off. “It’s fine.”

She had long been used to it. Catherine, on the other hand, suddenly started crying, “Please don’t be mad. I didn’t know you were with Vance. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have called him.”

Rebecca stared in disbelief as she looked back and called out to Vance. He was already walking over at the sound of her cries.

“You should stay with Rebecca. I can go there alone,” she sobbed, her tears coming on cue. “I’ve hurt her once. If I drag you away today, she’ll hate me even more.”

It was ridiculous. Rebecca wasn’t mad at all.

Vance soothed Catherine. “She won’t. You’re overthinking.”

Rebecca stared. Since when did he become her spokesperson?

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“You guys go ahead. Don’t worry about me,” she said, wanting no part in their drama.

“But she hated me for that incident in the meeting room,” Catherine said. “I feel terrible. I always think about apologizing to her and making things right.”

Rebecca was done with her play. “Excuse me. If you feel bad and want to apologize, shouldn’t you be looking at me? Why are you staring at him?”

Vance frowned, pulling her aside. “I just told Cathy you’re generous and wouldn’t get angry. Why are you doing this again?”

“I’m not angry at all.” She yanked her arm free. “You two can do whatever you want. Just leave me out of it. I don’t care.”

“See? You’re mad.”

“I’m not. Not worth the energy. I have more important things to do. My cab’s here. Move.”

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“Cathy doesn’t dare look at you because you’re too scary,” Vance explained.

The cab pulled up right on time. Rebecca opened the door, climbed in, and slammed it shut without waiting for him to finish.

She was scary? Hilarious.

The woman trying to burn her alive was a sweet bunny in his eyes, while the victim was being called scary. 2

In the back seat, she pressed a hand to her chest, grateful that she was almost free of this pair and that a whole wide world was waiting for her. That cage would have trapped her forever and drained her vitality.

Back home, she showered and grabbed something to eat, then video-called Josette. She didn’t dare visit the hotel too often in case her parents followed her and caused more trouble.

Josette looked relaxed on the screen, and she was relieved.

She hadn’t checked eBay all day, and notifications had piled up. Opening them revealed a dozen more closed deals.

She checked the time; it was still early enough to ship them. While Vance was away, she quickly packed the rest of the clothes and called the courier.

After two rounds of decluttering, her closet now had huge empty spaces, but she didn’t feel regret.

Instead, her shoulders felt lighter than air. It was like carrying a crushing backpack for miles and suddenly dropping half the weight. She felt like she could fly.

Then she started scrolling through different apps and stumbled on a local news story: Vance Bradford visited a retirement center to check on the seniors and donate supplies.

The article called him an outstanding young entrepreneur who visited to show care, hoping that all seniors would have the support they needed in their later years.

It gave him plenty of positive press and clicks.

Catherine appeared smiling in some of the photos, drawing zero attention. The fame-hungry woman had somehow stayed completely in the background during this publicity wave.

But regardless of the motive, be it pure PR or a scheme, the seniors had enjoyed the afternoon.

Rebecca swiped past the story.

Vance still wasn't home by midnight, A call woke her up from her sleep. It wasn't Vance, but Aiden.

"Do you want to come and pick up Vance?" he asked.

She blinked, unable to believe her ears. What were they thinking?

"Vance is wasted," Aiden explained. "He keeps saying he has to go home and show you something important. Come get him."

"What is it? Just have a courier bring it." Rebecca was wide awake now but had zero interest in playing chauffeur.

"Rebecca..." Vance slurred on the phone. "Never mind. No need to come. I'll get back on my own. It's the stuff from this afternoon."

She realized it was Soren's signed waiver and the notarized papers. Just then, chaos erupted on the other end. Plates and glasses were smashed.

"Vance, don't push yourself. You're in no shape to drive; a ride-share isn't safe either. And your cold-hearted wife isn't coming downstairs to get you," Aiden said.

"Vance, forget it. Just crash at Cathy's tonight," Lucas suggested.