

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Novel - Chapter 5

Chapter 5

After that incident, Rebecca turned to books. She hadn't planned far ahead; she simply wanted to infuse her empty life with quiet pursuits. Keeping busy might dull the sting of those words. She never expected these small, personal distractions would, in the end, become her lifeline. She needed to ace tomorrow's exam. She had to leave this place, as far away as possible. The thought still brought intense pain to her heart. She couldn't distinguish if the ache stemmed from Vance or from her five wasted years. But it no longer mattered. What counted was refusing to wallow in the pain any longer.

Even if it lingered for ages before fading, she was committed to saving herself. She ordered a light meal and a set of disposable clothes. Then she phoned the front desk for a morning wake-up call, and at last, she compelled herself to sleep. Perhaps due to the previous night's insomnia, she slept soundly. The next day, she woke up on time and turned on her phone. Messages poured in, the device vibrating incessantly, all from Vance. She skipped reading them, fearing they'd disrupt her focus on the exam. After breakfast, she left for the exam center, which was a mere five-minute walk away.

As soon as she stepped out of the hotel, her phone buzzed with a call from Vance. In a panic, she nearly dropped it, swiftly rejecting the call before shutting it off again. Emerging from the exam hall, her heart pounded with exhilaration. She felt satisfied with her performance. The oral examiner smiled throughout their conversation. She understood most of what she heard, and the written parts felt steady and controlled. She dared not predict her score, but at least she had completed everything. She wasn't useless after all.

Walking alone on the sidewalk, she kept her head down, mentally reviewing every detail of the exam until a pair of leather shoes appeared in her path. Expecting no deliberate block, she couldn't retract her step in time and bumped into the person. Without his steady grip, she would have fallen. And that person was the last one she wanted to see. "Rebecca," Vance muttered, his voice strained. She remained silent, sensing his barely contained anger.

He grasped her shoulders and softened his tone, asking in his usual gentle, warm manner, "Why didn't you come home?" He asked that question while knowing the answer, but it wasn't the time to argue with him. Her bag had just been knocked to the ground, the flap open, and her exam pen peeked out, which could give away her participation in the exam. She quickly wrenched free, squatted down, shoved the pen inside, and secured the bag. "What's that?" he asked, looking at her bag. "Nothing."

Just a pen," she replied, trying to sound natural, though her fingers gripped the bag so tightly they blanched. "Let me see it," he said. She clutched it closer. "What do you need a pen for?" "Give me your phone," he demanded. After a brief standoff, she extracted it from the bag and handed it over. He glanced at the dead phone, then handed it back. "I called you so many times and sent countless messages. Why didn't you respond? Still angry?" She held the phone, relieved he hadn't delved into her emails or discovered the exam-related messages. If that was his only concern...

She had no desire to argue with him or explain anything. She simply wanted to flee far away, and that urge intensified in his presence. Mistaking her silence for lingering resentment, he sighed, "You're usually so understanding. Why run off over this?" Rebecca swore she intended to stay calm, but his words would provoke even a saint. "Was it my fault? Was I being unreasonable?" she shot back. "Should I have joined in and complimented Aiden on his spot-on imitation?" Vance's face flushed with awkwardness. "That's not what I meant. You can't control what others say.

There is no need to take their words to heart." "I can't control them, but you could!" she retorted, staring at him. "What were you doing? Laughing with Catherine pressed against you?" "Rebecca!" His expression darkened, revealing anger for the first time. She understood that Catherine was his sore spot. What more was there to say? She hugged her bag, trying to walk past him. His arm extended, wrapping around her waist and pulling her close. "I'm sorry for yelling at you," he murmured. "I just don't want you to misunderstand Catherine. She is a friend, just like the others.

I only see her as a sister. She's unmarried, so speaking ill of her isn't fair." Rebecca couldn't grasp his reasoning. Hadn't they brought this on themselves? Catherine had leaned on him shamelessly, yet they feared commentary? She managed only a faint "Oh." "Rebecca..." he paused, detected her detachment. "Why still upset? You stayed at a hotel alone and didn't return home. I haven't even reproached you much, yet your anger persists?" That was his typical line. In his mind, it was her fault for everything. "Come on, let's drop it," he cooed. "Lunch first.

Then I'll accompany you to the mall, alright?" Rebecca considered it. That was fine. She had something to tell him anyway. Vance led her to a nearby restaurant. As they entered, Rebecca instinctively lowered her head, raised her collar, and shuffled behind him to downplay her limp. It was a habit, though she soon relaxed. If she didn't measure up, so be it. She wasn't planning to match him anymore. Once seated, Vance placed the order, passing her the utensils, when the food arrived. "Dig in. These are all your favorites," he said, his voice as soft as ever.

Rebecca eyed the spicy dishes and smiled bitterly. He had no idea she couldn't handle spice; home dinners were always spicy because he preferred them. "I'm not hungry," she said, not touching the food. "I have something to tell you." "What is it?" he asked, raising an eyebrow. "Wherever you want to go, I'll join you. I have the whole afternoon free. We can hang out, and then we'll go to your parents' house for dinner." She stared at his barely perceptible smile, her heart flooding with profound bitterness as she contemplated the words she was about to utter.

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