Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 551

Rebecca had long since given up any expectations for this relationship. Breaking up was inevitable, yet her heart still ached with a quiet sadness.

She had once genuinely cared for Desmond, pouring real emotion into their time together. As those words sank in, the cups and plates before her blurred.

“Then, I wish you guys a safe journey,” she said softly, offering no words of protest.

Desmond stared at her, tears finally flooding his eyes.

Kaitlyn and Gabriel excelled at polite small talk. Once the important matters were settled, the two families exchanged pleasantries–light, meandering topics that drifted everywhere and led nowhere.

Everyone remained perfectly courteous, but the friendliness felt even less sincere than a business negotiation. At least, business meetings carried the intent of cooperation.

Rebecca had no idea what Desmond’s parents thought of her. Perhaps they blamed her for what had happened to their son.

Even so, there was nothing she could do. Every parent just stood by their child.

Beneath the surface of carefully maintained peace, the dinner finally ended. Joyce rose with a practiced smile. “Thank you all for coming tonight. This gives the whole situation a perfect closing. No matter what, let’s stay in touch.”

They were only empty pleasantries. The fact that things hadn’t escalated into outright hostility was already thanks to both families being civilized people.

The Schroeders left the restaurant first. When Rebecca’s group stepped outside, only Desmond remained on the sidewalk. His parents were waiting in the car.

It seemed he wanted a few private words with her.

“I’ll just say a couple of things. It won’t take long,” Rebecca whispered.

Gabriel nodded. With him watching, he wasn’t worried about any trouble.

Rebecca walked over to Desmond, who had been staring at the ground. He slowly lifted his head, his gaze heavy with pain as it settled on her.

“I’m sorry,” he muttered, his voice rough and dry, as if scraped across sandpaper.

Not responding, she just stared at the face that had once been so full of confidence and spirit. Now it was etched with defeat.

Her heart twisted with pain, but she couldn’t bring herself to say, “It’s okay.”

After a long silence, he spoke again, his voice barely audible. “My parents... They booked flights for the day after tomorrow.”

She hummed lightly.

“From now on...” He paused, his throat tightening with emotion. “Keep dancing. Do it well.”

She turned her head away, her eyes stinging. “You too. Take care.”

He forced a smile that looked worse than crying. He lowered his head, muttered a quick “Goodbye,” and hurried into the car.

As it pulled away, his parents rolled down the windows and waved goodbye to the three.

It was finally over..

The very next day, Rebecca returned to the rehearsal studio and threw herself back among her fellow dancers. She danced with abandon, pouring out her emotions through movement and rediscovering the happiest version of herself in the dance.

When the new term began, she received a letter from Vance, mailed to Kaitlyn’s house. It was a simple postcard with a short passage carefully photocopied, trimmed, and pasted onto the back.

[I drove into the Lake District. The sky was overcast, the mountains a deep, rain washed green that gleamed under the clouds. Following the gravel path, the wind blew sharply and cold, and the water looked murky.

[They squeezed onto the red-roofed tour boat, its engine rombling as it pushed away from the shore. Once farther from land, the chatter of voices suddenly fell quiet.

[Water birds hid among the bushes; a flash of gray wings, and they vanished into the deep green.]

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It was a brief travel journal entry. The handwriting wasn't Vance's; she knew his script too well.

It was obviously a photocopy, and she couldn't help wondering, "Could this be from Darren's travel diary? Has Vance gone there, copied a page, and pasted it onto the postcard for me?"

She hadn't known Darren that well.

It was said that handwriting revealed one's character. Darren's script was bold and strong, his sentences short and direct, which meant he was straightforward and masculine as a guy.

She slipped the postcard into a drawer.

The second letter arrived a week later. This time it wasn't a postcard but a printed sketch on paper. She couldn't quite place the meaning of the figures until a letter slipped out of the envelope.

[Dear Rebecca,]

[I couldn't resist writing to you. After leaving the Lake District, I found the guesthouse where Darren once stayed. It sits right along the road–a century–old, classic, countryside cottage that's incredibly charming. I wish I could take pictures and send them to you; you'd love it.]

[The place is filled with old objects, especially the paintings on the walls. Some were passed down through the owner's family for generations, others left by guests.

[The one you're looking at is one Darren left behind. Do you remember what he drew? Flip it over for the answer.]

Rebecca eagerly turned the sketch around. She now recognized the bold, firm strokes. It was Darren's handwriting.

[Brought my friends to the cottage. Who was the one loving these chubby little houses?]

She flipped it back and studied the drawing. Darren's skill was surprisingly good.

With the right context, she easily recognized several old classmates: Darren, Vance, Jethro, a few familiar boys whose names she couldn't recall, and two girls–she and Jenny.

She reluctantly set down the drawing and on to read the letter.

[You know what? The owner still remembered him. Said he stayed for nearly two weeks, carrying his sketch board and going out to draw every day.

[She remembered him so clearly because he was an American and incredibly handsome. His car, jacket, boots, and easel were cool, but the coolest thing was his eyes. I asked her, "Is he more handsome than me?"

[She nodded without hesitation. Said Darren was bursting with vibrant life force, way more handsome than a listless gentleman like me. I didn't tell her that Darren was gone, Let her remember his bold, lively spirit instead.

[I feel so despicable. Here I am, with my fading life, stealing warmth from someone who's already passed away. Using the traces he left behind–his youthful energy and vitality–to heal this wretched existence of mine.

[I wish I could show you the world he saw. Unfortunately, we send the photos instead.

[From Vance after a heavy rain.]

He had left Anna's contact information at the bottom.

blocked each other. If you want, you can add Anna and ask her to

"So, he has gone with Anna," Rebecca murmured, setting the letter down

She sat quietly for a while, imagining the lakeside cottage with rain beating against the windows.

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In the end, Rebecca found asige frame and placed the sketch on her desk.

She gazed at the drawing of herself wearing practice clothes. Her hair was pulled into a high bun, and the expression in her eyes was captured perfectly.

She took a photo of the sketch and sent it to Jenny, asking the latter to guess who everyone was. Jenny screamed in excitement over the messages–a reaction that Rebecca had anticipated.

She chuckled, lay back in the lounge chair by the floor–to–ceiling windows, and continued to chat with Jenny.

Vance's letter was written after the rain, but right now the weather in Paris was lovely. Sunlight streamed through the windows, carrying the same healing quality he had described in Darren.

Jenny: [We really had the simplest kind of happiness back then.]

Rebecca couldn't quite remember how happy she had been in those days. Her whole life then had consisted of studying, dancing, and quietly liking someone.

Maybe because she had experienced too much deep pain since then, the happiness and unhappiness of those years had faded.

Jenry: [Where did you get this sketch?]

Rebecca: (Vance sent it. Darren drew it. It was hanging on the wall of a countryside guesthouse in France. Isn't that kind of amazing?]

Jenny: [What is Vance doing now? Are you two not fighting anymore?]

Rebecca told the story of Vance following Darren's old travel route. She knew Jenny cared more about what was happening between her and Vance.

Rebecca: [Jenny...]

Divorcing Vance had felt like cutting off a piece of her flesh, and the whole messy chapter with Desmond had left a shadow in her heart that refused to fade.

Various thoughts flooded her mind, but she couldn't shape them into words.

Jenny: [What's wrong?]

Rebecca: [Loving or hating someone takes energy. So, I've decided not to hate anyone anymore, and I won't fall in love with anyone either.]

Jenny guessed that Rebecca and Desmond had broken up. She had never really been optimistic about them anyway. Breaking up was probably for the best–better a short pain than a long one.

But Rebecca had clearly been hurt again. Not wanting to offer empty comfort, Jenny tried to lighten the mood. Jenny: (Don’t be so pessimistic. Don’t you love me?]

Rebecca: [Yes, I love you! Good enough?]

Jenny sent her a “sisters” emoji.

Rebecca was staying mostly at Kaitlyn’s house now, but she still returned occasionally to the apartment near school for a quick lunch break or to shower after dancing

Desmond was no longer living next door, but Denise was: They ran into each other from time to time. Denise still addressed her warmly, but Rebecca found it hard to face her.

Denise felt guilty, so their encounters were usually awkward. Until one day, after the greeting, Denise remained standing there, looking like she had something to say.

Rebecca still carried guilt toward Desmond. If something bad happened to him because of her, she wouldn’t rest easy. She wanted to know how he was doing

“Denise,” she said, forcing a smile, “do you have something to tell me? How is Desmond doing?”

The rims of Denise’s eyes instantly reddened.

“What’s wrong?” Rebecca panicked.

Denise quickly shook her head. “I thought you hated me now and would never talk to me again.”

“How could I?” Rebecca said softly.

She just didn’t know how to face the Schroeders.

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“Desmond is doing well,” “Denise said. “He joined the company and stays busy every day. My parents are even setting him up on blind dates.”

Those words lifted a heavy weight from Rebecca’s heart. She truly hoped Desmond could move on and meet new people. “Don’t put any pressure on yourself,” Denise contiqued.

“They will take good care of him. Actually, my dad never really liked that Desmond was into dancing. Bringing him back home fits what he wanted.”

She covered her mouth, realizing her improper expression. “I didn’t mean dancing was bad...”

Rebecca smiled gently. “I understand.”

She even understood that Sean probably hadn’t wanted her as a daughter–in–law, With their status, they would prefer someone from an equal background who could strengthen their influence.

During the summer when Desmond had come to Soliaridge to handle his visa, she had overheard him arguing with Sean on the phone several times. He thought she didn’t know, but she had heard every word.

Denise nodded. “I’m glad you understand. They talk about giving us freedom, but even my sister’s marriage wasn’t her own choice.

“She didn’t marry the person she loved. Anyway, you should be happy from now on. Next time you have a performance, you have to save me a VIP ticket.”

Denise tilted her head, looking adorably hopeful.

“Sure.” Rebecca nodded.

Whether it was the truth or just comfort, the girl was genuinely kind and thoughtful.

The troupe was recruiting new members. Some students were leaving Paris and wouldn’t renew their contracts, so Rebecca needed to fill the spots early.

They also needed fresh dancers for new productions, and she wanted to develop a few potential principal dancers.

Thanks to their success at the arts festival, quite a few talented applicants had shown up. Rebecca set aside two full days, for auditions.

The moment a girl named Margaret Shaw appeared, Rebecca sensed something different. She was young with excellent proportions and a long, graceful neck like a proud swan.

She wore an expensive, custom–made leotard; every detail showed careful attention and screamed wealth. She performed the required combination with almost no flaws. Her technique, strength, flexibility, and control were all impressive.

What shocked Rebecca most was that in the free–performance section, she danced a full excerpt from Deer Cry. It was complete and expressively accurate.

If they didn't accept Margaret, none of the others would make the cut. After discussing with the senior members of the troupe. Rebecca finalized the list, placing Margaret first.

Once the new dancers joined, the troupe dove into even more intense rehearsals. Many carnivals and performances were scheduled for the second half of the year, and several shows were already booked.

Margaret performed well at first. With her strong foundation, she stood out, and Rebecca had even started grooming her as a potential lead.

Then the would–be lead grew complacent. During rehearsals, she constantly nitpicked Rebecca's choreography

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Margaret even requested to modify some tnoves in the already polished piece.

At first, Rebecca listened seriously, hoping the production could keep improving. But she soon realized Margaret wasn't offering genuine suggestions but simply finding faults.

Rebecca could spend an entire day or night considering one suggestion, yet Margaret would throw out five or six in a single day. Before she could digest the first, more kept coming.

Gradually, other dancers came to Rebecca with complaints. Margaret mocked others for dancing poorly and deliberately bumped into people during practice.

After one rehearsal, Rebecca asked Margaret to stay behind for a talk.

Margaret stood before her with an arrogant posture. Even though the purpose was obvious, she kept her chin held high and looked at Rebecca with utter disdain.

Rebecca spoke honestly. "Margaret, I know you're very talented. But since we're all part of the same team now, could you please put the good of the group first?"

Margaret gave a contemptuous laugh. "What? I'm surrounded by weaklings, and I'm supposed to lower myself to their level?"

Rebecca frowned. "It's not cool to talk about your teammates like that."

“Why not? I just tell the truth,” Margaret snorted. “And you’re the same. I thought this was supposed to be some legendary troupe led by a mythical choreographer.

“Turns out it’s nothing special. You’re just riding on reputation. What happened to the Swallow? Now you’re just an old hen, huh?”

Margaret wasn’t even 20 yet. Her frame was tall, her skin tight. She flaunted her youth and superiority right in front of Rebecca.

Rebecca’s eyes narrowed. “So, what’s your aim of joining the troupe?”

“Didn’t I just tell you? I came to see the famous Swallow, but I’m disappointed.”

“Care to specify your disappointments, aside from the personal attacks?”

“Calling things as they are counts as a personal attack now? Aren’t those dancers dumb? Aren’t you an old hen? You’re too old to play a deer. Does that clumsy body of yours even have a deer’s lightness?”

Margaret performed right there a leaping movement of the nine–colored deer. It was light and beautiful

“You took someone else’s creative work and drove the creator away. Now you’re dancing the lead yourself. How can you even call yourself a dancer? Doesn’t your conscience hurt at night?”

She took someone else’s creative work? Drove the creator away? Rebecca couldn’t possibly accept such a serious accusation. “Make that clear. Whose work did I steal? Groundless slander is defamation!” she said sternly.

“Do I really have to spell it out?” Margaret sneered. “You used to be lame. A cripple trying to choreograph? How did you even do it? Obviously, someone else created the dance. You kicked them out, took the credit, and became the star. But to the dance world, you’re a total disgrace.”

“Whose choreography did I steal?” Rebecca demanded.

Deer Cry had been hers from concept to stage. She knew every dancer involved. Only a couple had left the troupe.

Margaret wouldn’t call a corps de ballet member the original creator, so it had to be either Desmond or Willow

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But the two had both returned to the States. Willow was said to be a principal dancer in a troupe.

“Willow Stanton?” Rebecca said tentatively.

Margaret showed no reaction.

Rebecca tried again. “Desmond Schroeder?”

Margaret’s expression shifted, and Rebecca figured out the situation.

“If you have so many problems with the troupe, we can terminate the contract. Cooperation goes both ways,” Rebecca said. “But if you slander us with no proof, I will reserve the right to sue.”

“Go ahead and sue me. See if you can win. I don’t fight unprepared battles, Coach,” Margaret snorted, her voice thick with sarcasm.

She walked past Rebecca with her head held high. At the door, she turned back. “As for terminating the contract... I don’t want that either. You have no grounds to fire me. I haven’t violated any terms. If you terminate it without cause, I’ll sue you.”

Rebecca watched her leave, wondering if she had been sent by Desmond for revenge.

That evening, Rebecca returned to the apartment near school.

Denise brought over fruit tarts. “I bought these. Let’s share them.”

Afraid Rebecca would refuse, she added quickly, “I can’t finish them all by myself.”

The weather was still warm. Denise had set up a table and two chairs in the garden, along with pastries, so they could enjoy an early evening tea before dinner.

Rebecca asked her directly, “Do you know Margaret Shaw?”

Denise had just speared a piece of tart, a raspberry wobbling on top. At the question, her hand shook, and the berry fell.

“You know her?” Rebecca understood at once.

Denise put down the fork and sighed. “Ugh, now the tarts don’t even taste sweet. How do you know her? She didn’t come to France, did she?”

Not only had she come, but she was in Rebecca’s troupe.

“Looks like she’s already started bothering you,” Denise said with a knowing look. “She is our neighbor, a little older than me. She’s liked Desmond since we were kids. When he started dancing, she did too.

“He got into the dance academy, and so did she. When he came to France... I heard over winter break that she was planning to come. Now that Desmond’s back, she still ended up coming to study here.”

So, Margaret had a crush on Desmond.

“The girl is arrogant, spoiled, and domineering. She never let Desmond hang out with other girls: After graduation, he ran off to the Soliaridge troupe to get away from her, but she still went to see him from time to time.” Denise shook her head. “It she gives you trouble, just ignore her. Tell me next time, and I’ll handle her.”

Rebecca laughed. “You’re that capable?”

Denise tilted her head. “I’ve been fighting with her since we were little. I always manage to make her furious. I’ve got years of practice.”

Rebecca didn’t mention that Margaret was already in the troupe. From what Denise said, the two families were close, and their battles” sounded like the playful rivalry of fond enernies.

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This was her troupe. Rebecca–decided to handle the problem herself instead of dragging any Schroeder into it.

Just then, a sharp voice rang out from the courtyard gate “Hey, little troublemaker, what are you doing there?”

“Speak of the devil.” Denise raised an eyebrow and snorted toward the gate. “Well, well, Her Highness is here. Sorry, this place is too humble for your royal presence.”

“Girl, how can you be so blind? Chatting with an outsider? Is your brain damaged?” Margaret scolded, eyeing Rebecca.

The outsider, in her words, was clearly Rebecca.

Denise smirked. “Yeah, so you should leave.”

Margaret froze. “What do you mean?”

“You said not to talk to outsiders. So, why are you here? Go ahead and leave.” Denise gestured.

“What the hell?” Margaret pointed at herself, furious. “You’re calling me an outsider?”

Denise waved it off. “Who else? Your last name isn’t Schroeder. You have nothing to do with us.”

“What about her?” Margaret pointed at Rebecca. “How long have I known you? How long has she known. you?”

“She is my sister,” Denise said, hugging Rebecca’s arm.

“You’re a Schroeder, and she’s a Perry. What kind of sister is she to you?” Margaret scowled.

Rebecca found it strange. Margaret had been haughty and composed in front of her, but in front of Denise, she turned into a firecracker.

Denise leaned against Rebecca. “My mouth is on my face. I can call whoever I want ‘sister.‘ Can you stop me? You want me to call you sister? Then go win over Desmond first. You’ve been chasing him for over ten years.”

Margaret blushed with anger. “Just you wait!”

“I’ve been waiting for over ten years,” Denise said, looking up at the sky. “Notre–Dame burned down and got rebuilt, and you’re still nowhere close.”

Margaret couldn’t handle Denise. She turned her anger on Rebecca. “You’ve got some skills, wrapping both brother and sister around your finger.”

Rebecca started to speak, but Denise jumped in. “Oh, why don’t you show us some of that skill? What’s wrong? You don’t want to?”

Margaret raised her hand, then dropped it in frustration. “I came here to see you and even planned to treat you to dinner, and this is how you treat me?”

“Dinner?” Denise’s eyes lit up. “Sure! Where did you book? If it’s too cheap, I’m not going. It wouldn’t suit your status.” “I booked it two months in advance,” Margaret snorted. “Don’t I have a good heart?”

“Oh, your ‘good heart‘ is definitely up to no good, but I’m just too clever for you.” Denise linked arms with Rebecca. “I want Rebecca to come too.”

Rebecca patted Denise’s hand. “Maybe next time. I already made plans with Gabriel for dinner. He’s coming to pick me up soon. “Alright then. I’ll treat you next time.” Denise nodded, letting go.

Rebecca walked around the garden wall toward her house next door. Behind her, she heard Margaret say, “When are you going to treat me to a meal?”

Denise yelped, “Geez! It’s almost fall, and there are sitli mosquitoes buzzing. I’m going to change my clothes.”

Margaret was left speechless, and Rebecca confirmed her guess.

Denise complained about Margaret, but they were clearly fond rivals.

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Rebecca opened the door, ready to go in, but Margaret called out, “Stop!”

She turned around to see Margaret following her.

“You’re calculating!” Margaret sneered. “No wonder a divorced, older woman like you could wrap there around your finger. It’s because you live right next door!”

Rebecca had no intention of arguing. “I know you’re very talented. But since you are part of the troupe now and don’t plan to leave, I hope you’ll focus on dancing.”

Margaret’s lips curved in mockery. “And on what basis are you saying that? As the coach, or as Desmond’s ex–girlfriend?”

Rebecca stayed calm. “As a dancer. I’ve seen too many talented dancers ruined by things outside of dance.”

“Are you lecturing me?” Margaret sneered, lifting her chin even higher.

The disdain in her eyes overflowed. “Save it. Stop acting so high and mighty. You just happened to meet Desmond and used his ideas to make yourself famous. You’re just better at pulling tricks.”

She glared. “Do you know that when he talks about you now, he only sees it as an embarrassing chapter he’d rather forget?”

“You’re mistaken about something,” Rebecca sighed. “Whatever happened between Desmond and me is over. No matter what you say, you can’t humiliate me or hurt me.

“My conscience is clear. If you insist on continuing this, then I’ll borrow your words: I’m waiting. Whatever you do, I’ll meet you head–on.”

She stepped inside and prepared to close the door.

Margaret reached out and blocked it. “Move out! Whatever the rent is, I’ll pay double. Just stop living here.”

Rebecca paused. How had the conversation suddenly jumped to moving?

Margaret had done some basic research on Rebecca. The Schroeders had only mentioned a dancer who injured her foot. Later, she learned that Rebecca was divorced and that her ex–husband’s company had gone bankrupt.

That made Margaret label Rebecca as a gold–digger who had left her bankrupt ex and latched onto Desmond, the rich but naïve heir.

She hadn’t paid attention to Soliaridge gossip before, so she only knew Rebecca came from an ordinary family

How else could someone from that background afford to study abroad except by renting cheap places and hooking up with rich kids?

She didn’t know Rebecca had a wealthy cousin. Neither Desmond nor his parents had told her. Now Margaret was determined to drive Rebecca away so she wouldn’t corrupt Denise.

Rebecca didn’t want to keep arguing over these pointless things. “I’m going to count to three. If you don’t let go, I’ll call the police.”

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Aaron and his team were nearby. Since the attack, they had been instructed never to let Rebecca leave their sight.

As long as she shouted, they would appear immediately. But Margaret wasn't a criminal. She was a girl and a member of her own troupe.

After a brief standoff, Margaret let go, and Rebecca closed the door. The moment is shut, she heard Denise exploding outside "Margaret! Why are you bothering Rebecca again?"

"I just don't get it! How can you side with someone who hurt your brother like that?"

"You don't understand. That's not her fault, and besides, she treats me well."

Their voices gradually faded, and Rebecca sighed quietly.

Denise had lived next door for a whole year now, and they had truly grown close through daily life. Rebecca had treated her like family.

When Denise struggled with the climate or got sick, Rebecca had always taken care of her. That was why Denise favored her so much.

Now that things had fallen apart with Desmond, Rebecca didn't know how much longer this bond would fast. But it was normal for people to meet and part.

Right now, Rebecca needed to figure out how to deal with, or at least guard against Margaret.

After that encounter, Margaret quieted down in the troupe. She stopped nitpicking and making snide remarks. Instead, she started getting along well with several members, often treating them to meals and giving them gifts like lipstick and face creams.

If the troupe really became harmonious, Rebecca would be relieved. She just feared that the calm would precede a bigger storm.

The following period was extremely busy. Not only were there daily rehearsals, but she also had to prepare for a research trip to Ireland next month with her mentor's team to explore traditional Irish dances that were in danger of being lost.

According to her mentor, Uriah Moss, the Deer Cry and the Mountain and Sea series told stories of animals, and the dances they would study were ancient ones that imitated animals.

They could even bring the troupe for an exchange. It would be a wonderful opportunity to gain knowledge and learn from others.

Rebecca was excited.

Just before the trip, they still had one more performance. With only about ten days left until the show, she kept rehearsals balanced so the dancers could perform at their best.

One day, just before rehearsal began, Margaret made her move. She stood motionless in her spot, and several dancers around her stayed still as well.

“Margaret, is there a problem?” Rebecca noticed.

“I want to terminate my contract,” Margaret replied, pulling the girls closer. “And so do they. We’re leaving together.”

“Terminate?” Rebecca asked. “Are you sure?”

“I am.” Margaret lifted her chin. “I read the agreement. It’s just a matter of paying a penalty, right? Money is one thing I have plenty of. I’ll pay all of it, including theirs.”

She had spent the past weeks building good relationships with these girls precisely for this moment to catch Rebecca off guard at the most critical time.

She would like to see how the show would go on with so many dancers absent.

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Rebecca was unperturbed. She scanned everyone standing with Margaret, then said, “What if I don’t agree?”

Margaret smiled contemptuously. “Then we won’t show up. Go ahead and sue us. Worst case, you get some compensation.” “Have you thought about what this says about you?” Rebecca warned her. “Breaking your word, showing no responsibility, and having no respect for the stage/Will any other troupe ever want you again?”

Margaret's attitude reminded her of Desmond. They were both rich and willful, leaving whenever they felt like it.

"Simple and naïve," Margaret said. "Who waits around miserably, hoping a troupe will hire them? I'm rich enough to start my own troupe. Anyone who comes to dance for me will get five or ten times the salary. The girls leaving with me today will be the founding members. I won't treat them badly."

"What a shame!" Rebecca sighed. "You don't truly love dancing."

"You're hilarious. Do people from families like ours need to make a living from dance?" Margaret burst out laughing. "Can you even imagine? People like us don't even know what earning money feels like. I sit at home, and money just comes in. How could I be like you, relying on dancing to survive? I just dance for fun."

"Alright then," Rebecca said regretfully, holding onto a sliver of hope that Margaret truly loved dance.

After all, Margaret was really talented. If she had, Rebecca would have been willing to wait. But if not, there was no point.

She stepped back and looked around at all the troupe members.

"I'll say it again: I won't force anyone. You can leave with Margaret as you like. I won't stop you. She'll pay your penalties anyway. Anyone who wants to stay, come stand by me."

Everyone except the small group around Margaret rushed over to her side. They gathered around her and glared at those traitors. The senior members, who had been through so much with Rebecca, were furious about their actions.

Margaret clapped her hands and laughed. "I never would have guessed there'd be so many unwise people, turning down ten times the salary just to suffer with her. Your brains are all messed up. Choosing hardship when you don't have to."

She turned to the dancers still with her. "You girls are the smart ones. Don't worry. I'll keep every promise. I'll pay the penalties, build a new troupe, and give you ten times the salary. Now, go on and tell your coach loudly and clearly what you've decided."

She stepped aside, ready to enjoy the triumphant moment. The dancers exchanged glances. One of them started counting, "One, two, three..."

Margaret gloated, waiting for the slap in Rebecca's face. The girls suddenly joined hands and shouted, "Coach, we're coming!" They rushed over to Rebecca and threw themselves into a big, warm group hug with her.

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Chapter 561

“Coach! We’re with you! The girls threw their arms around Rebecca, jumping and laughing so enthusiastically that they nearly knocked her over.

Rebecca hugged them back tightly, unable to stop herself from laughing. She had already fallen for this kind of trick onre before. There was no way she would be caught off guard again.

Margaret’s scheme was the same as what Desmond had pulled back then. He had taken Willow out to dinner, showered her with gifts, and finally lured her away.

Having grown up with Desmond, Margaret had learned all his tricks. Moreover, she had been at odds with everyone in the troupe from the start, so her sudden friendliness had been far too suspicious.

Rebecca had been prepared the whole time. The girls had already come clean to her earlier, saying, “Coach, let’s see what she is really up to.”

That was how tonight’s scene had unfolded.

Margaret, who had been so confident of victory, stood stunned for a moment before humiliation crashed over her. She had bragged so boldly in front of Rebecca, only for reality to deliver a sharp slap.

She lost control and shrieked, “Are you stupid? I offered you ten times the salary!”

A girl named Heather Casey stepped forward to face her.

“We’re not like you, Margaret. We genuinely love dance. We want to make it our lifelong pursuit and career. What we’re looking for is the greatest possibilities this art can offer, while you only treat dancing as something fun.

“So, even if you offered ten times the salary, what difference would it make? You can afford it for a month or a year, but what about two years? Three? Ten?”

“So what?” Margaret sneered. “I could pay you for ten or twenty years without blinking. Money is the least important thing to people like us.”

“Guess we’re just on different paths.” Heather crossed her arms. “We want real development and growth in the dance world.

“Even if we spend our whole lives dancing in the corps de ballet, at least we’re earning our living with our skills and can hold our heads high. We’re not handing our careers and futures over to someone who’s just playing around for fun.”

Heather turned to the others. “Right, everyone?”

“Yes!” they answered in unison.

They had come together and endured so much because they shared the same dream. Some might leave the troupe one day, but it would be for their personal reasons–not because they abandoned the group on a whim or created a crisis for the troupe they had once sweated and bled for.

Rebecca clapped loudly. “Well said! Alright, everyone, let’s get back to rehearsal!”

Thankfully, Margaret had never truly integrated into the troupe, which had given Rebecca time to stay on guard. Otherwise, suddenly losing so many dancers right before a performance would have been disastrous.

Margaret couldn’t tolerate such humiliation. She felt as if the entire troupe had trampled her dignity underfoot. In a fit of rage, she terminated her contract on the spot and instantly wired the penalty fee to the troupe’s account.

“This pathetic troupe doesn’t deserve me anyway!” she declared arrogantly before storming out.

The moment she left the studio, she dialed Desmond on a voice call. He didn’t pick up, but she would not give up.

Finally, his irritated voice came through. “Are you sick in the head? I’m in a meeting, and you’re calling nonstop.”

Margaret’s anger flared. “Your ex–girlfriend bullied me, and you’re calling me sick?”

“Rebecca?” Desmond’s fone sharpened with arm. “What did you do?”

“She bullied ific, and you’re asking what I did? Why don't: you ask what she did instead?” Margaret’s fury burned even hotter.

Desmond gave a cold laugh. “You think I don’t know my girlfriend well? She bullied you? She wouldn’t bother you unless you provoked her first. Why don’t you just claim you’re the queen?”

“What the hell? You’re still calling her your girlfriend? You scumbag! Are you trying to play both sides?”

“Both sides? Please, enlighten me.”

Margaret hissed through gritted teeth. “Our families have been discussing our marriage!”

“Did I ever agree to that? Did anyone even ask me?”

“How am I any worse than that divorced older woman?”

“Shut your mouth! You’d better behave yourself over there. This isn’t a joke. Mess with her again, and there will be consequences!”

“I was trying to get revenge for you! I was standing up for you, and you’re yelling at me?”

“Revenge for what?”

Margaret burst into tears. “When your parents brought you back from abroad, you were so broken you didn’t even look like yourself anymore. I couldn’t stand it.

“The guy I’ve loved and kept in my heart got treated so badly by someone else. I wanted to get justice for you. And you’re so mean to me!”

Desmond fell silent. After a while, his voice softened considerably. “Alright, stop crying.”

“I’m not crying!” Margaret sniffled. “I’m just angry.”

“Then stop being angry,” he said gently. “Enjoy your life there and hang out with Denise if you want. Just stop bothering Rebecca.”

Not long after the troupe completed their performance, they followed Uriah to Ireland for a cultural exchange. As part of the program, they performed their signature piece–Deer Cry–but since it was a multi–troupe event, they only danced one act.

ounded by But even that single act was enough to create a sensation. Rebecca and the other dancers were surrounded by flowers and applause. They took one curtain call after another, but the audience refused to leave.

Only after they performed an encore did the crowd finally disperse, allowing the troupe to return backstage and remove their makeup.

A massive flower basket awaited them. The attached card read: [Finally got to see it live. Congratulations on a successfut performance. Congratulations to Swallow for flying higher and farther.]

There was no signature, but Rebecca knew who had sent it. That handwriting was all too familiar.

“A gentleman left it,” a theater staff member explained. “He said there were too many people in the audience and he didn’t want to disturb you, so he left the flowers here.”

At this moment, Vance should still be traveling along Darren’s old route. So, his journey had brought him to Ireland as well? He wrote that he finally got to see it live. It was the truth.

The only performance he had ever seen was the troupe’s very first show, when the female lead had been Willow, not Rebecca.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 562

After several days of workshops and exchanges with the local art students, Rebeca followed Uriah to several remote island villages to study traditional Irish dance

There were performances during those days, but Vance never appeared again. He must have Zentinued onward, and his next stop was unknown.

Because the undergraduate students needed to return to classes, only Heather, along with one of Uriah’s other students, accompanied Rebecca to the villages.

The destination sat nestled between mountains and sea Rebecca’s previous knowledge, and she felt a touch of nervousness as they approached:

a place few outsiders knew. At least, it had never appeared in any of

They arrived at sunset when the entire village glowed in warm orange light. The houses with their pink granite walls made the place feel like something out of a fairy tale.

There was only one entrance. Strolling between the pink–walled cottages felt peaceful and secluded, as if the rest of the world had disappeared.

Accommodations here were mostly family–run guesthouses. Rebecca, Heather, Uriah, and one male student stayed together in the same house.

“There’s a session every week here,” Uriah told them. “Top dancers come and perform improvisationally. Today, let’s just go experience it first.”

Rebecca and Heather were thrilled. They had never seen such a raw, authentic show before. They dropped their luggage, grabbed a quick bite, and followed Uriah to a pub famous for traditional music.

It hadn't fully darkened yet. They sat inside, and each ordered a pint of local dark beer.

Rebecca normally didn't drink, but the atmosphere felt perfect, so she ordered one, too. She took a sip and found it surprisingly good.

Then they simply waited. What she hadn't expected was to run into someone before the dancers even appeared: Vance and Anna. She had never seen him dressed like this.

The weather had already turned to early winter. He was bundled up, but the worn vintage leather jacket, equally distressed jeans, and sturdy boots gave him a wild edge. When he moved, one could almost smell cigar smoke and pine.

The pub wasn't large, and there weren't many customers yet. Rebecca and Heather stood out as foreigners. Vance spotted her the moment he walked in.

After the initial shock, joy lit up his face.

"Rebecca? What are you doing here?" He strode straight toward her as if nothing uncomfortable had ever happened between them, like old classmates reuniting after many years.

Rebecca smiled at Anna behind him. "I came with my mentor for research."

Up close, she noticed the loose, thick-knit sweater under his leather jacket.

These things were never his favorite. He used to prefer proper suits and fine, fitted cashmere in winter. There had never been a hint of casual laziness about him.

Anna's outfit matched Vance's style. She didn't seem bothered by the cold, just wearing a shirt under a similar leather jacket with chains on her pants. She looked effortlessly cool.

Anna smiled at her warmly. "Nice to see you again."

Rebecca felt a flicker of surprise. Would a girlfriend really be happy to meet ner boyfriend's ex-wife? But Anna's smile looked sincere.

Vance calmed down from the excitement and fally realized he might have beeh too forward. He politely greeted Uriah, then retreated with Anna to their table.

Heather recognized them. "Aren't those the owners of the cookie house?"

Rebecca nodded. "Exactly."

“Who would have thought of this?” Heather clicked her tongue. “They closed the shop and went traveling together to such a remote place. So impulsive and romantic.”

Rebecca smiled, saying nothing. She was more interested in the pub itself; she had never seen a place like this.

The walls were covered with all kinds of musical instruments, such as guitars, banjos, and vielins. They were beautifully arranged throughout the space.

Their table sat beside an old fireplace. The fire crackled warmly, chasing away the early winter chill. The bar counter and wooden floors looked original.

Old newspaper front pages on the walls recorded historic events, like the sinking of a famous step. Sitting there, Rebecca felt pleasantly warm.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 563

After several days of workshops and exchanges with the local art students, Rebecca followed Uriah to several remote island villages to study traditional Irish dance.

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Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 564

Gradually, the crowd grew, and the night deepened. The pub came alive with its most magical hour.

In the small open space in the center, a band took the stage. The moment the accordion played the first cheerful note, guitars and cellos joined in, launching straight into an Irish jig.

Rebecca had never danced this style before. At first, she only watched, but the energy in the room kept rising until the whole was boiling over.

When the free, old–fashioned step dancing began, she couldn’t resist any longer. She grabbed Heather and went onto the floor

It didn’t matter if they knew the steps; they could just follow along and learn.

As everyone’s enthusiasm soared, the pub turned into pure chaos. People–strangers and friends alike–laughed and shouted, pushing their way into the tiny central space.

They linked arms, stomped their feet, and danced with clumsy, passionate joy. The air ignited with a raw, all–embracing happiness.

In the middle of the frenzy, Rebecca lifted her head. Her gaze cut through the moving bodies and unexpectedly locked with another pair of eyes.

It was Vance who had come up to dance, too. He clearly had no idea what he was doing; his movements were hilariously clumsy. Like an awkward bear, he bounced along with Anna, who seemed to be enjoying it.

Rebecca thought it was nice. It looked like Vance had finally learned how to be a worthy boyfriend. Who would have imagined he would ever go to a pub and dance just to make his girlfriend happy?

The music grew faster, pushing the atmosphere to its peak. Those who didn't know the steps quickly fell behind. Many stumbled and nearly fell in the crowded space.

Vance was one of them. He was bouncing right beside Rebecca when someone bumped into him. His teet tangled, and he pitched straight toward her. She jumped back instinctively, and he crashed into a local man instead.

The man quickly steadied him. The two of them looked at each other and burst out laughing.

When the song ended, Rebecca was sweating and breathless. She hurried off the floor, desperately thirsty, and gulped down he large pint of dark beer.

The night passed in pure, wild abandon. Here, there were no grudges op complicated emotions just music, dance, and beet When they got tired, they went down for a drink. And when they drank enough, they went back up qui ed

Rebecca had never experienced anything this uninhibited in her lite It felt incredibly freeing, hike standing at the esige så the world and forgetting all the worries of ordinary lite

The aftereffects were strong. Not only did she keep humming the tunes and bouncing as they left the pub, but her cheeks were flushed from the alcohol

And she wasn't the only one Everyone else was singing and dancing the way back to their lodymys

The village was still hively even at this hour When they finally returned to the guesthouse, the boat had prepared toed the nich aroma of meal greeted them the moment they stepped inside

It was a traditional Irish stew Their host, a red nosed Irishman, enthusiastically invited them to eat. The table held not only stew but fresh oysters, potato pancakes, and plenty of beer

Rebecca, Heather, and the others sat down without hesitation. Then the host called two more people to the door Vance and Anna.

With a big grin, he explained that they were staying next door and had been eating with him for the past two days. As the two walked in, Rebecca wondered if it was too late to excuse herself and go to bed.

Unaware, the host thought he had made a wonderful arrangement. “You’re all Amexicans. It’s nice to get together.”

Rebecca didn’t know what to say.

Vance’s face was also unusually flushed. As soon as he sat down, he took off the jacket he had just put on outside, earning a teasing remark from Anna.

He hadn’t drunk any alcohol, yet his mood was higher than ever. He told Anna, “It’s fine. I’m great. YOLO. Do you understand that saying?”

She shook her head, and he explained, “You only live once, so enjoy yourself to the fullest.” Anna glared at him playfully, and he laughed. “Alright. Let’s all have a good time tonight.”

His gaze landed on Rebecca’s face.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 566

Rebecca picked up a piece of black bread, dipped it in the stew broth, and took a bite.

It was still very hard and chewy. The parts not soaked in broth were tough enough to hurt the inside of her mouth.

She imagined Darren eating this kind of bread and, perhaps because of the alcohol, his image grew clearer in her mind She began to remember that no matter what he ate, he always seemed genuinely happy.

There had been one time...

She had practiced so late that when she finally reached the cafeteria, most trays were already empty. Only Darren was still at the counter.

She usually didn't pay much attention to him, but that day she noticed how much he ate. His tray was twice the size of hers and piled high with rice. Only two dishes remained at the window–a bit of cabbage and some meat. He looked ready to take it all.

Noticing her arrival, he only took half a scoop of cabbage and started to leave. She guessed he was leaving the meat and the rest for her.

"Hey, let's split the meat," she called after him.

How could he eat that huge tray of rice with only half a scoop of cabbage? But he turned around with a mysterious smile.

"I know a real delicacy. Want to come eat it with me?"

"Huh?"

She was intrigued by his expression. Delicacy?

She ended up going with him, mostly out of guilt. If he was tricking her, she figured she could at least split the meat with him. He led her into the school woods to hunt for cicada nymphs. When he piled a small mound of them in front of her, she nearly lost it.

"You... should just eat the meat," she said with a pale face, pushing her plate toward him.

"You don't understand," he said mysteriously. "They're delicious."

She watched as he cleaned them, built a simple stove with stones, and used the lid of his stainless–steel lunchbox as a pas to roast the cicada nymphs. Then he invited her to try some.

She stayed out of pure guilt. But there was no way she was eating that. She gave him all the meat from heppiate, but he still insisted on eating the insects.

"Since you gave me half the meat, I'll give you half the bugs," he said.

Terrified, she quickly pulled her plate back. is the end, he returned the lean meat to her, keeping only the fatty parts and chili peppers for himself.

"This is good! The bugs taste even better with fat and spice!" he exclaimed, eating with relish

Rebecca had no idea how she had managed to finish her food. It was probably because she had practiced so hard and was starving

On their way back, he said, “You know, locusts are good, too. Next time

There was no next time! Absolutely not!

She didn’t even wait for him to finish before grabbing her plate and running away as fast as she could she didn’t want to hear another word.

His laughter followed her–happy and carefree. He always seemed to be that happy.

Rebecca’s eyes grew misty. Surrounded by the warmth of the fireplace and the aroma of stew, she felt as if she had returned to that evening.

The cicada nymphs sizzled on the crude stone stove. In front of her, the boy took off his school jacket for her to hold and wore only a loose T–shirt while chasing after the insects.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 567

Darren liked wearing loose clothes. Especially in spring and autumn, he often wore oversized, thick–knit sweaters

Rebecca squinted. In her blurred vision, the person speaking across from her looked like Darren.

“Darren,” she said, drunk and dreamy. “Did you ever catch locusts and eat thert. later?”

The person across from her paused. “What did you call me?”

“Darren...” She rubbed her eyes and finally realized it was Vance.

She waved her hand. “Never mind.”

“You re drunk,” Vance said.

Yes, she was. Otherwise, she wouldn’t have mixed them up.

She felt a wave of melancholy, resting her forehead on her hand. “I drank too much. Let’s call it a night.”

She stood up, leaning on Heather. “Come on. Let’s go back to our room.”

“Okay,” Heather replied, having a better tolerance for alcohol.

It had only heightened her mood; she was still quite clear-headed. She turned to say goodbye to Anna, then helped Rebecca head to their room.

Vance and Anna spoke in unison. “Bye.”

Rebecca never expected that she would dream of Darren that night.

12 years had passed. There had even been many years when she had completely forgotten about him. Yet here she was, in a remote corner of a foreign country, dreaming of him.

He came roaring up in a cool, modified off-road vehicle, the deep rumble of the engine tearing through the quiet coastline. She and a group of classmates stood on a dock, watching as he approached from a distance and finally stopped in front of them.

The car door opened, and Darren jumped out, wearing worn work pants, boots, and a loose sweater as the sea wind pressed against his body.

“Hey, you’re all here. I brought you a real delicacy,” he grinned, pulling out a plate of fried locusts.

Jenny screamed beside her, and the dream ended.

In the darkness, the image of Darren with his wind-tousled hair and brilliant smile remained vivid. She could even smell the mix of gasoline, sea breeze, and sunshine-wild yet clean.

But she knew it was only a dream. It could only be a dream.

The vibrant person had been gone for years. She had buried his belongings beneath the century old camphor tree at the ancient church.

Why was this happening? When he was alive, she had barely thought of him. Now, years after his death, people kept mentioning him, and tonight she had even dreamed of him.

It felt uncomfortable, as if something were lodged in her chest.

She reached for her phone and quietly searched: [What does it mean to dream of someone who has passed away?

The internet offered a long list of analyses. She added more details. It was a classmate I haven’t seen in a long time. We were classmates with little interaction.]

The answers suggested it might represent a past era of some quality she currently needed, lacked, or was experiencing in her life.

She put down her phone, processing the information. Whether the interpretations were accurate or not, she agreed with one point: the quality Darren had embodied was something she needed–living boldly and freely, shining warmly and brilliantly.

Life was short, but it could bloom brightly like fireworks.

After setting the phone aside, she soon fell back into a deep sleep.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 568

The rest of the night passthout further dreams

When she woke up the next morning, Rebecca was clear–headed again. Thinking bark to the dorm.

been triggered by revisiting high school memories last night

That day, they were scheduled to visit the home of an elderly traditional dancer on the island. They had originally plans their host to take them, but he had sudden business, asking his brother next door to grade them instead

When they arrived at the neighboring house, Rebecca suddenly remembered that Darren had once stayed there. She co help studying the building more carefully.

This guesthouse appeared to have been operating longer than the others. It was probably the oldest in the village. One of its distinctive features was a large cabinet filled with guestbooks.

It was tidy and clean, yet brimming with a sense of history at every turn.

Rebecca stood in front of the cabinet, wondering if there might be a page with Darren's message. But they were about to leave. and there were far too many books to search through.

A voice came from behind her. "Looking for Darren's message?"

She turned to see two people coming out. Anna smiled at her, and she greeted Anna politely, then answered Vance, "I was thinking about it, but there's no time now."

"I already looked," he said.

“There really is one?” she asked expectantly.

“I took a photo.” He nodded, pulling out his phone and opening the picture.

But when she leaned in curiously, he playfully hid it.

“I’ll send it to you,” he said, tapping his phone against hers.

A picture with the now–familiar bold handwriting transferred over.

“The host said I could tear out the page, but I thought if Darren’s dream was to travel to every corner of the world, then his ŋeark should remain where he once stayed,” Vance explained. “It’s like leaving a sign so the world remembers he was here.”

Rebecca opened the photo and read the message, nodding in agreement with his decision.

The words on the page came into focus: (If you want to forget the world, come here. If you want to remember the world, come here. It’s a place that makes you forget and yet makes you long to remember.)

The message was beautifully cryptic. Her interpretation was that the music, beer, and dance here could help people forget their troubles, but at the same time, they would saiss the people they cared about even more

So, Darren had someone he missed. She remembered the “dancing girl” Vance had mentioned when reciting from the journal last night and couldn’t help asking, “Did Darren have a girlfriend? Was it the dancing girl he mentioned?”

She thought it made sense

Maybe he had brought his girlfriend here because the girl loved dancing, and he had wanted to give her the ultimate experience of music and movement

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 569

Vance looked into her eyes and femained silent.

Rebecca nodded. “Looks like you don’t know either.”

“I do know,” he said quickly.

She waited for him to continue.

“I know he didn’t have a girlfriend,” he muttered, lowering his head. When he looked up again, his smile became en But I don’t know who the dancing girl was.“1

Rebecca recalled the man from her dream. He was driving along the coastline with boundless energy and vitality. Even now, the image felt alive.

“What’s wrong?” Vance asked, noticing her strange expression.

“I don’t know how to explain it,” she sighed. “Sometimes people are so contradictory. He was such a good person. When I think of him going through life all alone, without anyone ever loving him, it feels so sad. But then I think the opposite.

“If that girl had loved him, how devastated she would have been when she lost him, and how long it would have taken her to heal. So, I don’t know whether it’s better that he had a girlfriend or not.”

“How do you know he was good?” Vance asked curiously. “We weren’t even in the same class. I only knew him through basketball. You didn’t really know him.”

She rolled her eyes. “Wasn’t he better than you?”

Anna wasn’t nearby at that moment, and she couldn’t resist adding, “Why do so many good girls like scumbags? So unfair!”

His brows twitched. “Come on.”

Jriah and Heather arrived just then. Rebecca picked up her things and left with them.

Heather looked back at Anna and Vance. “See you tonight for drinks!”

Rebecca paused. “When did you make plans to drink with them?”

‘Last night,” Heather replied. “We’re staying here for a whole week, and so are they. We’re neighbors, so why not?”

“What? They’re staying here for a whole week?” Rebecca was shocked. “They don’t have anything to do here. Why would they stay for so long?”

Heather shrugged. “I don’t know. Maybe they like the local atmosphere?”

After they left, the host came over and asked Vange, “Are you sure you want to extend your stay?”

“Yes,” Vance said firmly. “We’ll stay another week.”

“Great!” the host replied cheertsily and brought them breakfast.

The spread included sausages, bacon, black pudding. It was a hearty meal.

“Where are we going today?” Anna asked after they finished eating. “We’ve already explored every corner of this village.”

Vance thought for a moment. “To the seaside.”

The village sat right between the mountains and the sea. From the path along the cliffs, they could see the vast ocean A highway wound along the coastline like a jade belt.

Vance pointed at the road. “It looks just like the scene from my dreatns Lately, I keep having the same dream of my friend driving an off–road vehicle along the coastline toward us.

“We’re all so young. Rebecca, I, and many of our old classmates are standing there waiting. He comes speeding toward us with the scent of gasoline and sea breeze.”

“You’ve been thinking about him a lot lately, so of course, you’re dreaming of him,” Anna reasoned.

“No.” He shook his head. “If I said it wasn’t because of that, would you believe me?”

She didn’t understand. It wasn’t about belief.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 570

“Lately, I often don’t know whether I’m in a dream or in reality,” Vance sighed. “Rebecca asked me before why I suddenly wanted to follow Darren’s route.

“You never told me why either,” Anna said, thinking he would explain now, but he didn’t.

He only smiled, his gaze drifting far into the distance, as if on that coastal highway a rugged off–road vehicle might really com speeding toward them.

Rebecca had stayed in the village for six days. Every day was spent visiting elderly traditional dancers, listening to their re abou: the inheritance and details of their art, learning their steps, and performing her own dances for them.

Just as Darren had written, this place could make people forget the outside world. But they couldn't stay here forever. Eventually, they had to move on to the next stop.

After participating in the weekly session and making friends with many top dancers, they decided to set off again.

On their last evening, Rebecca danced with her friends until late. When she returned to the guesthouse, she joined Uriah, Heather, Vance, and Anna for another meal.

"Wishing you a smooth journey ahead," Vance said, pretending they were barely acquaintances as he raised his glass to everyone.

Of course, he also clinked glasses with Rebecca.

"Our paths will separate from here," he added, speaking to the whole group.

Rebecca's team was heading to more villages with dance traditions. Vance and Anna would continue following Darren's route i a different direction.

"I wonder if we'll run into each other again," Heather said, her emotions loosened by alcohol.

Over the past week, they had eaten together every evening and sometimes danced together at the pub. Plus, she had always loved the desserts from the cookie house, so meeting them here felt like fate.

"We will!" Vance said with absolute certainty.

Heather smiled. "Yeah, we'll see each other back in Paris anyway."

Anna smiled warmly. "Looking forward to it."

The next morning, when Rebecca's group left, Vance and Anna were nowhere to be seen. They had probably already departed

The host brought over the guestbook from his brother's guesthouse and said they could leave a message if they wanted

Rebecca thought for a moment and wrote: [Forget what should be forgotten and remember what was once lost Rebecca Perry from America)

She set down the pen just, as Uriah called for her She quickly picked up her suitcase, joined the others, and set off for the next village.

After they were gone, Vance appeared with Anna to check out

“Your friends have already left,” the host told him

“I know.”

“Would you like to leave a message?”

Vance opened the guestbook. The most recent entry was Rebecca’s.

“Oh, she wrote something What does it say?” Anna asked, unable to read English.

Vance translated it for her, then wrote below her message: [Cuimhneoidh mé ort go deo, a ghrá mo chroí–Vance from America

He handed the pen to Anna. “Do you want to write something?”

She shook her head. “It’s fine.”

The host, who could read the sentence, asked curiously why he hadn’t written in English.

Vance thought for a moment. “Maybe because I’m timid.”

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 571

Rebecca’s research trip with Uriah in Ireland lasted a full month.

They spent the final week in Dublin, leaving two days open for a traditional local festival that Uriah said would offer a completely different experience.

They stayed at the same guesthouse where they had first landed in Ireland. The host was an old friend of Uriah and always accommodated him.

The host mentioned that on the festival day, children would dress up in costumes and go door–to–door performing dances.

Rebecca found the idea charming. Uriah suggested that she and Heather join in.

“We’re not kids anymore,” Rebecca said, a little embarrassed.

Both the host and Uriah laughed. “In our eyes, you’re still children.”

Rebecca and Heather burst out laughing.

“The money they collect from dancing goes to charity,” Uriah added.

In that case, they would go.

On the festival day, Rebecca and Heather got into costume, learned the steps from the local children on the spot, and went door to–door performing with them.

A heavy snow had fallen, blanketing the entire city in white, but it did nothing to dampen the festive spirit. The whole place felt like a winter wonderland filled with music and singing.

They followed the children through the neighborhoods, dancing from house to house until they were warm all over. When they knocked on yet another door, the big smile inside froze for a split second before blooming even wider.

Heather was excited. “Hey, we really do keep running into each other!”

The person who opened the door was none other than Vance.

He smiled at Heather. “Yeah, the snowstorm was too heavy, so we decided not to push forward. We’re heading back and will continue our trip in the spring.”

He was speaking to Heather, but his eyes flicked toward Rebecca.

Rebecca looked inside and saw Anna, who smiled and waved at her.

Vance chuckled. “It seems your relationship with Anna is better than it is with me.”

Rebecca rolled her eyes What was he thinking? After everything, how could their relationship be good?

Heather was surprised. “When we were drinking in the village that night, Anna said Rebecca was her friend. You were jusë tagging along.”

Vance’s smile faltered “Uh, right ”

It was also his first time experiencing this kind of festival. He stared curiously at the costumes “What are you guys doing?”

Heather twirled “Dancing, of course! Happy holidays! Now hand over the donation!”

She had even added her own playful flair

Vance burst out laughing “Nice! East Coast meets Irish tradition ”

Chapter

“Don’t just stand there blocking the way,” Rebecca said impatiently. “You’re holding up our schedule. We still have the next house to visit.”

“Oh, go ahead.” Vance stepped aside to let them perform. Then he pulled out his phone and started recording. “You don’t mind, do you?”

Heather shook her head before Rebecca could object. It was part of the local custom, and tourists often filmed it anyway

Once they finished dancing, Vance introduced them to the homeowner, “These are my friends from America.”

Then he turned to Rebecca. “This is Anna’s family.”

“I see.” Rebecca nodded. “Then should I congratulate you on meeting her parents?”

As an ex–wife, she figured she was being perfectly polite. Vance paused, not expecting that remark, but he laughed it away. Thank you.”

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 572

After finishing their performance at that house, Rebecca and Heather continued to the next one with the children.

Vance kept recording with his phone.

Heather whispered curiously, “Why do I get the feeling that Mr. Cookie is more familiar with you!”

“He’s my ex–husband,” Rebecca admitted frankly.

“Huh?” Heather’s eyes widened in shock. Then she looked torn. “I chatted with him quite a bit. What position am I sup take? Should I hate him?”

Rebecca was amused by her reaction. “Don’t worry. It’s all in the past. He doesn’t have anything to do with me anymore.”

“No way. I can’t talk to him anymore,” Heather declared, full of righteous indignation. “If someone as wonderful as you divorced him, he can’t be a good person.”

Rebecca shook her head. “Alright, it’s our turn to dance again!”

The children’s music and singing started up once more. In the cheerful melody, they were too busy moving their feet to remember old grudges. Those had already scattered with the wind.

That afternoon, Rebecca and Heather went to explore the Christmas market. The moment they stepped inside, they didn’t want to leave.

There was mulled wine, roasted apples, handmade pastries, local sauces, and snacks... Rebecca even found New York–style roas beef.

Everything imaginable was there. From one end of the market to the other, their hands were never empty. What they loved mos were the handmade crafts–hats, candles, jewelry, wooden toys, and wool products–all unique and impossible to find elsewhere.

Rebecca wanted to buy everything. In the end, she stopped in front of a porcelain jar. She had always loved cups, plates, and all kinds of pottery, and this jar really spoke to her.

But... She looked at the several large bags in her hands. There was no way she could carry something this big back.

She set her bags down and hugged the jar, reluctant to let go.

“Hold it, and I’ll take a picture for you,” Heather suggested. “It will be like you bought it ”

Rebecca was worried the seller might mind and asked first. The seller was delighted that she liked it and pappily agreed

Rebecca pressed her cheek against the jar for the picture, then bought two cups and two plakes instead she left with deep regist looking back several times

Life really was full of small regrets

She decided to stop there “Let’s grab something to eat and head back

They were flying out the next day, so tonight was their last chance to enjoy themselves

“Sounds good “Heather followed her to a pizza stall that also sold dark beer and sausa

They ordered one pizza, two sausages, and a cup of hot shark beer each

“Looks like you’ve fallen for the dark beer here,” a familiar voice sand

Rebecca took a sip “It’s you again ”

She really had grown to like the laste. Or maybe it wasn’t the beer itself but the simple, pure days she had spent surrounded ortiv by dance and fellow dancers—days that let her forget all worldly troubles.

“We’re just browsing the market, too,” Vance said. “Our flight back is tomorrow. What about you?”

“What a coincidence! We’re not on the same one,” Heather said quickly.

Ever since learning that Vance was Rebecca’s ex–husband that morning, she had decided she could no longer be overly friendly with him. She had been wrong and needed to correct it.

Sensing the change in her attitude, Vance looked at Rebecca and laughed self–deprecatingly. “It seems I’m not very populat here.”

Beside him, Anna couldn’t help but chuckle.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 573

“Well, I’ll leave you to it. Have fun,” Vance said, still smiling brightly.

“He looks way too happy,” Heather muttered.

Rebecca glanced back. In the glow of the festival lights, Vance turned as well and gave her a gentle stile. She had noticed lately that he smiled often now. He really did look good when he smiled.

Back in high school, his cool, distant aura had been attractive, but his rare smiles had felt like winter sunlight–chilly yet dazzling. During their five years of marriage, he had rarely smiled. Perhaps she simply wasn’t the person who could make him smile.

That was fine since they had already separated. It was good that he had finally found someone who could make him smile so brightly.

Scumbags always had the best luck. How unfair!

Vance spotted the New York–style roast beef and eyed Anna excitedly. “Want to try? You said you’ve never had proper roast beef in the city. Let me see if it tastes the same.”

Anna looked at him, puzzled. “You seem happy lately.”

He raised an eyebrow. “You can tell that?”

“Uh–huh,” she hummed playfully. “I just don’t understand what’s so funny about your ex–wife barely acknowledging you.”

He turned and looked deeply in Rebecca’s direction. “As long as she’s happy, that’s enough for me.”

Rebecca’s flight left at noon the next day, and she didn’t run into Vance again.

She hadn’t brought Aaron and his team on this trip to Ireland, and her family had been worried. The moment she landed, Aaron was right there at the airport to pick them up.

After dropping Heather off at her dorm, he took Rebecca to the apartment near school.

She noticed a huge box sitting by her front door. “What is this?”

Aaron immediately became alert and gently moved her aside. He crouched down to inspect it carefully.

The contents were tightly wrapped in multiple layers. After peeling them back, Aaron finally revealed a porcelain jar.

“Miss, it’s a jar,” he said, reaching inside. Instead of anything dangerous, he only found a card. “This is for you.”

Rebecca recognized the jar and figured out who had placed it there. It was the same jar she had fallen in love with at the Irish market but hadn’t been able to buy.

And the only person who could have brought it all the way here was Vance. Apparently, he had seen how much she liked it.

She looked at the familiar handwriting on the card.

It read: [One less regret in your life, from Vance and Anna.]

Anna’s signature was written by herself. This was Vance’s way of telling her she could accept the gift without worry since it came from both of them.

Apparently, he had not only seen her but also heard what she said. She and Heather had been too absorbed to notice him passing by.

“Miss, what should we do with it?” Aaron asked, figuring out who had sent it as well.

Hebecca crouched beside the jar and studied it. She really loved it.

“Bring it inside,” she said.

That sender might be annoying, but the jar was genuinely beautiful.

She asked Aaron to place it in the perfect spot in the living room and spent a long time admiring it. It felt good to receive the gift, but she couldn’t just accept it without saying anything.

Vance owed her, but that sweet girl Anna did not. She mulled it over and decided to thank Anna properly.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 574

Having missed Christmas while in Ireland, Rebecca decided to go home and spend the rest of the holiday with her family.

She packed gifts for everyone, called Aaron, and headed back.

In the car, she handed Aaron some presents. “Happy New Year! Please give one to each of the team members.”

Aaron scratched his head, hesitant.

“Take it. Thank you all for your hard work,” Rebecca said, placing the gifts on the passenger seat.

“Thank you, Miss.”

“No worries.”

After Aaron dropped her off at Kaitlyn’s house, she walked inside.

Josette came over immediately, looked her up and down, and started fussing. “You’ve lost weight.”

In Josette’s mind, only being plump meant healthy.

Rebecca hugged the old lady. “I ate nothing but meat the whole trip. I gained five pounds. Any fatter, and I won’t be able to dance.”

Josette pinched her cheek. “I don’t see any weight gain.”

Kaitlyn came downstairs, smiling. “The house didn’t feel the same without you during the holidays. It just wasn’t lively enough. Gabriel and I used to spend Christmas here just fine. Clearly, it’s hard to go back to simple after getting used to luxury.”

Gabriel came down as well. “Yeah, you weren’t here, and my mom kept finding faults with me.”

Rebecca grinned. “Like pushing you to get married?”

“Not exactly,” Kaitlyn said. “I’m not going to pressure him about marriage. I just asked if he had any children out there. I don’t care if he stays single, but I don’t want the girl to suffer because of him.”

“Mom, what are you talking about?” Gabriel protested.

“Am I wrong? You’re already 30. You’ve been single for so long with zero rumors. I’m not old–fashioned. I’m just worried about your... health.”

Gabriel looked around. He was the only man there. “Mom, could you...”

His mother was so straightforward, and he didn’t know what to say.

Rebecca chuckled. “Aunt Kaitlyn, don’t be upset. I brought gifts for everyone.”

Kaitlyn was delighted. “Aren’t you so thoughtful?”

Gabriel smiled wryly. “Mom, it’s not like I didn’t get you anything.”

“Still, Becky, if Gabe shows any signs, you have to tell me,” Kaitlyn continued. “I’ve been watching a short drama lately, and he fits the archetype perfectly.

“A man his age who never talks about relationships usually has some unforgettable girl in his past, and there’s a good chance she ran off with his child. The thought of them struggling outside breaks my heart.”

Gabriel was speechless about her wild imagination. Rebecca laughed, realizing Kaitlyn had been misguided by the plot of that drama.

“No hard feelings, Gabe. You have one too,” she said, pulling out the gifts. “Grandma, this one’s for you.”

Some were from the market, others from the villages they had visited–mostly local handicrafts. They weren't expensive, but they were unique. Everyone loved them.

Rebecca told Gabriel, "Talmost bought you a green dress, but then I figured you probably wouldn't wear it."

"Why not buy him a green hat instead?" Kaitlyn said playfully.

Rebecca and Josette both burst out laughing. Even after years abroad, Kaitlyn still had her sharp sense of humor.

"Green is a symbol of vitality, Ms. Designer," Gabriel said helplessly.

"Yeah," Rebecca said seriously. "Men actually look good in green. Vance wore one while dancing."

"Vance?" Gabriel raised an eyebrow.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 575

Rebecca knew that Gabriel had crossed out Vance's name in his book.

But Gabriel wouldn't say anything negative in front of her. He simply pretended not to hear. "Dinner's ready. Grandma and my mom have been planning this meal for days. They changed the menu over and over to match what you like."

It made him feel like an adopted son.

Rebecca couldn't stop grinning. When she had first met Gabriel, even though he had been incredibly kind to her, she had been a little intimidated by his powerful aura.

But at home, especially in front of Kaitlyn, he was quite playful.

The whole family enjoyed a lavish meal together.

Just yesterday, they had been eating stew and sausages. Now they were back to fefined dishes, which tasted completely different.

After dinner, Rebecca chatted with everyone, sharing stories from her time in Ireland. She even performed the local dance she had learned. Everyone was delighted.

Only when she returned to her room did the month-long journey truly feel over.

The room still smelled of gardenia with the diffuser. She sat on the soft rug in front of the floor-to-ceiling windows, holding a cup of hot fruit tea.

Snow had started falling again outside. She opened the envelope, took out the paper with Anna's contact information, and sent the friend request. No matter what, she couldn't ignore Anna's kindness. She needed to thank Anna.

Anna accepted almost immediately and sent a greeting emoji.

Rebecca replied with an emoji, then typed: [I received the jar. Thank you both.]

She deliberately used "both" to stress that Vance and Anna were together.

Anna: [You're welcome.]

Rebecca: [I don't know how you managed to bring it back. It must have been tricky.]

Anna sent a giggling emoji: [He carried it.]

Rebecca smiled. Of course, she knew that, but talking about it with Anna felt strangely awkward.

Anna: [Is it convenient to video call?]

Rebecca was puzzled, then replied: [Sure.]

When she accepted the video request, the first thing she saw was a table full of plates and dishes from the same stall where she had admired the jar.

"Wow, you guys bought so many?" she gasped.

If she hadn't been limited by what she could carry, she would have wanted to buy the entire stall.

"Yeah." Anna nodded. "He really likes them, too."

Then she pointed at the dishes on the plates. "These are all made by him. American food."

Rebecca looked at the grilled salmon, sautéed green beans, and roast chicken. They were indeed typical American food.

She had always loved collecting cups and plates. The life she had once dreamed of was simple-eating with the person she loved, using beautiful tableware, and growing old with him.

It would have been so wonderful, but she had never gotten it. Now Vance was doing it for another woman, which brought her a strange feeling. She probably should have felt hatred, but at that moment, stre felt nothing, probably because the woman was Anna.

It was hard to describe Anna. She was always quietly in her own corner, occasionally reaching out with a smile to people outside her world.

Anna was so genuinely kind and adorable that even though she was Vance's current girlfriend, Rebecca couldn't bring herself to dislike her.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 576

If it had been any other woman pointing at the dishes and telling her that Vance had made them, Rebecca would have felt like she was showing off.

But when Anna did it, she felt nothing of the sort.

"Vance's cooking is pretty good," Anna said. "His sakes are delicious."

Rebecca smiled faintly. "I know. Didn't he open the cookie house for you?"

She swore there was no bitterness in her words–only a touch of melancholy.

Anna blinked. "For me? No, I didn't like that style."

"What?" Rebecca was surprised.

Anna nodded. "I even teased him for being childish."

Rebecca suddenly remembered the day Vance had explained why the shop was designed like a cookie house. He had spoken in English, and Anna probably hadn't understood.

"He's coming over," Anna said.

In the next instant, Vance appeared in the frame. "You're back? Did the trip go smoothly?"

"It was fine," Rebecca replied.

Looking at them together in the frame, she suddenly felt like they made a perfect picture—a warm dining table, dishes Vance had cooked, Anna sitting and waiting, and him standing behind her chair, leaning over slightly.

Rebecca took a screenshot. It came out beautifully–both of them smiling in the European-style house, like a painting.

Vance continued, “The weather forecast said snow in the evening, and it was pretty accurate. We were worried your evening flight might get canceled.”

“I got back at noon,” Rebecca replied. “I just wanted to thank you for bringing the jar back for me. Also... Happy New Year!”

After their divorce, she never would have imagined saying “Happy New Year” to him again. But facing Anna’s smile on the screen, she couldn’t bring herself to be cold.

It had nothing to do with forgiveness. From the ex-wife’s perspective, no matter how much she claimed to have let go and felt neither love nor hate, she still didn’t like the idea of Vance finding happiness. But Anna was innocent.

“Happy New Year!” they responded at the same time.

“Another year has passed,” Vance said, gazing at her through the screen.

Rebecca waved a hand. “You guys go ahead with dinner. Bye.”

She ended the call, looked at the beautiful screenshot, and sent it to Anna with the message: [It’s beautiful.]

Anna sent her a photo in return–a picture of her dancing in the first village. Vance happened to be standing beside her, looking at her, as they were surrounded by the locals and Heather.

Rebecca couldn’t figure out Anna’s intention. She wondered if it was a warning.

Anna: [You look beautiful, too. Happy New Year!]

That was it? There was no hint of warning. Or maybe foreigners were just more subtle about it?

That night, Rebecca slept poorly because Josette wasn’t feeling well.

The old lady had eaten a bit too much of the rich meal the night before and was suffering from indigestion. They quickly took her to the hospital.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 577

Luckily, Josette's condition wasn't serious.

After receiving an IV drip overnight and several hours of observation, she had stabilized, and they were preparing to take her home.

In the parking lot, Vance and Anna were getting out of their car. The two vehicles were parked right next to each other, so it was impossible not to see them.

They were wearing thick hats and masks, bundled up in down coats.

Rebecca realized this might be the first time she had ever seen Vance in a down jacket. In the past, he had always been so meticulous, complaining that down jackets looked bulky and unprofessional.

He greeted everyone politely and turned to Rebecca at last, asking who was unwell.

"It's nothing serious," Gabriel said, helping Josette into the car because it was cold outside. His tone was polite but distant."

Thank you for your concern, Mr. Bradford. We'll take our elder home now."

Josette asked from inside the car, "What are you doing at the hospital? Are you unwell?"

"Oh, it's not me," Vance said quickly. "Anna has a cold."

"Keep warm in this cold weather," Josette reminded them kindly.

"I know. Thank you," Vance replied.

The rims of his eyes turned red, and he pulled his hat lower to hide it.

Josette's and Gabriel's gazes lingered on Anna's hands that were holding Vance's arm. In the end, Gabriel spoke. "Let's get in the car."

Rebecca was the last to get in.

Anna called out to her, "Keep warm. Don't catch a cold as I did."

Rebecca smiled back. “You can get some tonics from the clinic to warm you up. It helps you recover faster.”

“I already bought some,” Vance chimed in. “I prepared it the day we got back from Ireland, but it wasn’t enough.”

Rebecca nodded and was about to get in the car when Vance called out to her. She paused but didn’t turn back.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t take good care of you,” he said.

She brushed it off. “It’s all in the past. From now on, just take good care of Anna.”

She got in the car and closed the door. The car drove off.

Actually, Vance hadn’t completely failed to take care of her. Before Catherine came back to the country, his biggest fear had been her getting sick. When she had a high fever, he would stay up all night checking her temperature.

Of course, it had been more out of guilt than love. Now it no longer mattered.

This encounter left Kaitlyn unhappy. In the car, she complained, “After seeing how he stayed up all those nights helping Rebecca, I thought he had some redeeming qualities. Now it looks like he’s still the same. Was it necessary to hold hands so tightly in front of us?”

“Exactly,” Gabriel agreed. “They’ve only been divorced for a short time, and he already has a new girlfriend. What’s so great about a guy like that?”

Josette felt sad hearing this. She had genuinely cared for Vance.

“Guys, it’s fine,” Rebecca spoke up, holding Josette’s arm. “What he does has nothing to do with us.”

Kaitlyn nodded. “You’re right. We should focus on the people and things that do concern us.”

“Mom,” Gabriel sighed, rubbing his temples.

Kaitlyn had recently become obsessed with the drama plot of him having a secret child somewhere. Their interaction amused both Rebecca and Josette.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 578

During the New Year holiday, many troupes and orchestras held special performances.

Rebecca's troupe had none scheduled. Kaitlyn suggested that they go see a concert or ballet together so Rebecca could finally sit in the audience and enjoy herself.

Rebecca searched for tickets online and discovered a production called "Phoenix in Flight" by an American dance troupe.

The promotional images felt strangely familiar. At a closeNook, she discovered the choreographer listed as Margaret Shaw.

Just then, her phone rang.

"Coach, have you seen the New Year performance promotions? There's this show called 'Phoenix in Flight' getting advertised everywhere. I have a bad feeling about the choreography," Heather said, her implication clear.

Rebecca remained composed. "Let's buy tickets and go to see it."

Given Margaret's devious character, this couldn't be anything good.

She had been in Ireland for a month, and Margaret had left the troupe more than half a month before that. In such a short time, producing a full dance drama seemed highly suspicious, even with Margaret's wealth.

Rebecca had been offline during her trip and hadn't paid attention to the internet. Only now did she realize the show was being hyped everywhere, both domestically and internationally.

The articles claimed that Margaret had spent five years polishing this ultimate work of American aesthetics to spread its beauty and concept across the world. Every promotional copy was passionate and uplifting, earning widespread praise.

The drama had been staged a couple of times, and the reviews were overwhelmingly positive. Some even compared it to Deer Cry, claiming it was ten times better.

Five years in the making? Really?

Rebecca, Heather, and a few girls from the troupe who were performing in the new piece "Rebirth" bought tickets for the soonest available show, but the more they watched, the angrier they got.

The reason was simple: the choreography was almost identical to that of Rebirth.

They didn’t even stay until the finale. Heather stormed out in anger.

Margaret was indeed rich. The sets and costumes were extravagantly luxurious, and she had even added holographic projections that made the audience feel immersed.

Yet no matter how flashy she made it, however, the dance moves and the core concept belonged to Rebecca, who had originally planned to premiere the new work this year.

In her opinion, although it was already good enough, there were still many parts that needed polishing and refinement.

After this performance, “Phoenix in Flight” became even hotter. Media outlets covered the drama and interviewed Margaret extensively. The hype swept across the internet like a storm.

At the end of the day, traffic could be bought even if there was no real momentum. Besides, the drama’s concept and choreography were genuinely strong.

Once again, almost every interview compared it to Deer Cry. Margaret’s responses were particularly telling: “Deer Cry is good, but it’s also my pain.”

Rebecca didn’t quite get the meaning. At first, she thought Margaret meant that the original male lead of Deer Cry had been Desmond, so it was painful for her.

Rebecca realized she had been too naïve as trolls began to spread the rumor that Deer Cry was Margaret’s creation and had been stoleni.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 579

The story was insane, but rumors spread like wildfire.

The most widespread version claimed that Deer Cry was a joint work by Desmond and Margaret. Rebecca had used unscrupulous means, repaid kindness with betrayal, and used the excuse of needing treatment for her leg to ask Desmond for help.

Out of loyalty to a former schoolmate, Desmond had found doctors for her and even accompanied her through rehabilitation.

But Rebecca’s real goal had been to seduce him. When Desmond refused, she stole the dance drama that he and Margaret had co -choreographed but hadn’t yet performed.

Several students who had attended school with them in France came forward with photos of Desmond rehearsing Deer Cry, using them as proof that the dance truly belonged to him.

And in the later official performances, he had been replaced by another guy. This only strengthened the rumor. Even ordinary netizens began joining in.

For a while, Rebecca was viciously attacked online as a mistress who had tried to steal someone else's boyfriend and as a thief who had plagiarized another person's work.

The insults were as ugly as they could get. Many were paid trolls hired by Margaret, but when there were enough of them, the lies started to sound like the truth. Outsiders began blindly following along.

Rebecca's social accounts were hit first, followed by the troupe's account and then the dancers' individual accounts. They were bombarded with vulgar abuse.

Several girls couldn't handle the vicious comments and came to Rebecca crying. Heather tried arguing back at first, but there were too many attackers. She eventually gave up, turned off comments, and asked in the group chat what they should do.

Some of the male dancers were so angry that they wanted to go smash up Margaret's show. Rebecca calmed everyone down, telling them to enjoy their vacation, rest well, and spend time with friends and family instead of focusing on the comments.

The matter couldn't be hidden from Gabriel. He found out almost immediately and came to ask Rebecca who Margaret was and when she had appeared.

Rebecca briefly explained her conflict with Margaret, then said, "I've got this. It's not a big deal."

She knew that she couldn't hide behind him forever. Gabriel looked at her determined expression, clenched his fist, and held back the urge to step in.

He nodded. "Alright. Let me know if you run into any difficulties. Don't try to carry it all alone."

Behind the scenes, he quietly instructed Aaron not to let his guard down for even a second.

Many people started reaching out to Rebecca about the situation.

Anna sent her regards, acting as Vance's messenger. Denise called Rebecca, apologizing repeatedly, but this had nothing to do with her.

Rebecca replied to everyone with the same sentence: "It's not a big deal. I can handle it."

Denise said Desmond already knew and would deal with Margaret, but Rebecca didn't believe it.

Right after she ended the call, an unfamiliar number called. She answered, and Desmond's voice came through. "Rebecca..."

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 580

Rebecca wasn't sure whether Margaret's stunt had any direct connection to Desmond, but the story about the dance could only have been leaked from him

She would like to hear what he had to say

"I've seen everything," he said

Rebecca hummed, waiting for him to continue.

Desmond was silent for a moment. "This is my fault. I didn't keep a close eye on Margaret."

She didn't respond.

Her exes seemed to enjoy apologizing to her on behalf of another woman. What kind of strange pattern had she fallen into?

"Rebecca..." His voice was low and slow over the phone, as if he were carefully considering the situation. "Turning public opinion around is simple."

He said so, but his tone told a different story.

Rebecca's eyes narrowed. "I'm listening."

"I'm in Paris right now. Can we meet in person? Let's talk face to face."

"Just say it over the phone."

After the breakup, she had no intention of seeing him again.

"You won't even meet me once?"

The words sounded familiar; someone else had said something similar before. Was this a standard ex line?

“No, there is no need.”

“But... If the rumors keep spreading, it will be bad. I’m worried, so I flew all the way to Paris to help you.”

“It’s fine. Thank you.”

She was ready to hang up.

“Wait,” he said urgently. “Why are you so cruel?”

His tone sounded almost aggrieved as he added, “But even though you treat me like this, I can’t bear to see you suffer. Even if you don’t come out, I’ll still help you.”

“I can handle it myself,” she declined, unwilling to owe him any more favors.

“Don’t hang up yet,” he said anxiously. “I know Gabriel has a lot of influence, but even if he steps in, the damage has already been done. Only I, as the person involved, can provide the most direct and effective solution.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“It’s very simple. As long as you come back to me, I will immediately hold a press conference to clear your name.”

She fell silent, realizing he hadn’t changed after all.

“Rebecca?”

“No need.”

She hung up the phone, but a text message came through right away.

Desinond: [If I don’t step up, this online attack will only get worse. It will affect all your future performances.]

She glanced at it and didn’t reply.

Another text followed: [Have you thought about it? If you continue performing with the plagiarism label hanging over you, the angry audience might throw rotten eggs onto the stage. How will you handle that?]

He had hit the mark.

Shortly after the call, one of the troupe members messaged in the group chat, warning those who hadn't gone home for winter break not to go to the studio.

She and another girl had just been hit with rotten eggs and tomatoes while practicing. The studio was now covered in trash.

Rebecca immediately replied: [Everyone, please don't go to the studio for now. Enjoy your vacation and rest well. If you're worried about getting rusty, just practice lightly at home.]

The situation was escalating rapidly.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 581

Some people went so far as to flood the college website with angry comments and complain directly to Rebecca's professors, demanding that the school feel ashatred of a student like her

Her doctoral program's website was also bombarded with harassment, and her advisor was doxxed.

The teachers who cared about her kept reaching obt. Lauren publicly defended Rebecca online, but she was quickly overwhelmed by waves of paid trolls.

Even her family members were doxxed. Her voice was ultimately swallowed by the frenzied online bombardment. She was forced to disable comments.

She called Rebecca and felt regretful. "Many faculty members are following this, but we really..."

They couldn't really help her much.

"It's okay, Professor," Rebecca reassured her. "Things are under control. Please pass on my thanks to the other teachers. Tell them not to speak up for me anymore. These things can't be cleared up with words alone. It only drags more people into the mess."

Lauren sounded heartbroken. "If Desmond could just step forward and set the record straight, this would all blow over. But what's going on with that boy?"

Rebecca smiled bitterly, knowing why.

“I just contacted him and asked him for help, but he was evasive,” Lauren sighed. “How did he become like this?”

Rebecca didn’t know either.

Desmond wasn’t like this when they first met. Perhaps only through close interaction could one truly know what a person was like.

She comforted Lauren and ended the call.

Gabriel couldn’t sit back. He asked her over and over whether she needed him to step in, but she shook her head each time.

It wasn’t the right moment yet. Since the frenzy had already reached this level, she might as well let it burn even hotter.

The online attack persisted throughout the holiday performance season. It sucked away all the attention from other shows and occupied the top spots in discussion and viewership.

Almost no one talked about any other performances. By the time the performance season ended, the New Year was approaching. Many netizens kept asking whether Margaret would appear at the annual gala. Her replies were always vague and noncommittal. One commenter pointed out the obvious truth: the gala had been planned months in advance. This dance routine simply couldn’t make it in time. But even that honest comment was torn to shreds.

According to her rabid fans, with Margaret’s elite background and deep pockets, she should have no trouble getting on the show.

In reality, she couldn’t, which was why she didn’t dare answer directly. Still, she decided to throw a lavish victory party to celebrate her huge success.

Rumors about the event began swirling before it started. It was said that many prominent figures and big-name celebrities would attend to support Margaret.

Rebecca felt the timing was finally right.

The victory party was held mid-month in the States. As expected, celebrities filled the venue, and their presence pushed the hype even higher.

Everyone was congratulating Margare!

With her approval, someone was live streaming portions of the event. In the clips, Rebecca saw Desmond and his parents. Since it wasn’t a full live broadcast, she had no idea what exactly had transpired inside.

Desmond walked up to Margaret with his father.

“Old pal, your daughter is truly outstanding,” Sears greeted.

Erik Shaw responded with modest politeness, looking at Desmond with appreciation. “Thank you. I heard from her that Desmond deserves most of the credit. He put a tremendous amount of work into the choreography.”

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 582

Sean laughed heartily. “Young people have their common language; that’s a good thing. The two of them grew up together, so helping each other is only natural Desmond is the boy. He should take good care of Margaret.”

Margaret beamed. “Desmond has always been so kind. We bickered growing up, but that’s just how childhood sweethearts are “Childhood sweethearts! Perfect!” Sean roared with laughter.

Meanwhile, Joyce was already discussing wedding plans with Margaret’s mother, Tiffany Shaw.

“Margaret comes from such a distinguished family and has been so well brought up,” Joyce praised. “She’s outstanding in every way. I’ve had my eye on her for a long time. I only hope we’re not reaching too high.“*

Tiffany grinned from ear to ear. “What matters is that they like each other. We’re not old–fashioned parents.”

The marriage was open for discussion, but Margaret was worried. Given his volatie personality, Desimond might explode there and then.

If he declared he would never marry her, she would be utterly humiliated. But to her surprise, he remained expressionless.

For her, that was already good enough.

She relaxed, going off to network and bask in the compliments. When someone brought up the recent scandal, she gave a proud smile.

“Honestly, I admire a cripple who managed to get back on her feet and dance again. Everyone needs dreams, right? Just making it back onto the stage is impressive enough; the quality doesn’t even matter. But stealing someone else’s work is despicable.”

“I heard she tried to seduce Mr. Schroeder.”

Margaret smiled without answering, but in this settling, silence was acquiescence. For a moment, people hurled all kinds of vicious insults at Rebecca to curry favor with Margaret.

Lauren and Pascal were also present that night. Hearing these words, they felt sick to their stomachs. As friends of the Schroeder family and with her past teacher–student relationship with Desmond, Lauren hoped her influence could prevent such malice toward Rebecca.

Clearly, her influence wasn’t enough. Yet she couldn’t just sit there and listen to the insults.

She stood up and said loudly, “That’s enough.”

All eyes turned toward her, and she continued passionately, “How can you say such things about Rebecca without your conscience hurting? I know better than anyone who created Phoenix in Flight.

“When she was conceptualizing her dance universe, she told me everything. Both Deer Cry and Phoenix were her originals. She even named the phoenix section Rebirth. You can’t just change the name and claim it as your own!”

Margaret was unfazed; she didn’t need to respond. Someone would defend her.

Sure enough, a girl beside her spoke up. “Mrs. Lemke, you can’t just side with Rebecca because she was your student. You clairs the dance is hers. Do you have any evidence?”

Lauren was stumped.

The girl pressed on. “But we do. This piece was jointly created by Desmond and Margaret. We have creation videos as proof.”

Lauren turned to Desmond hopefully. “Desmond, tell the truth. Was this dance really a joint creation between you and Margaret? Or was it between you and Rebecca?”

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 583

All eyes in the roof focused on Desmond.

Margaret clenched her fists nervously. After all these years, Desmond had never once backed her up. Toward her, he had shown nothing but irritation and avoidance.

“Professor, this dance wasn’t a joint creation,” he replied.

Gasps rippled through the crowd, and Margaret’s eyes glittered with joy. Laurer, stumbled back, her face turning ashen with disappointment.

“Pascal,” Lauren said to her husband, “I don’t care what you do, but even if I end up begging on the street, I won’t stay friends with people like this.”

She grabbed her purse and headed for the exit. Wearing high heels, she walked fast in her agitation and swayed.

Pascal hurried after her and caught her arm. “Slow down. You’ll fall like that.”

“I’d rather have a heart attack from rushing than stay here another second,” Lauren huffed. “Why did you come out? Aren’t you going to maintain your relationship with those people?”

Pascal helped her into the elevator, then said quietly, “The most important relationship I need to protect in this life is ours.”

Lauren paused, her eyes growing misty. “You believe in Rebecca, and I believe in you. Let’s go together.”

Their departure caused little stir. The party continued.

Margaret approached Desmond. “I never expected you’d help me. Thank you.”

“Help you?” Desmond sneered. “Don’t flatter yourself. I wasn’t helping you.”

Margaret fought back her annoyance. “I know what you’re like sharp-tongued but soft-hearted.”

“Sharp-tongued and hard-hearted,” he corrected her. “You want me to vouch for you? Get real. What does this piece have to do with you? You stole it, and now you’re trying to drag me down? I’m not a good guy, but I don’t steal.”

She seethed. “Then why did you say that earlier?”

“Just telling the truth. I’m not a co-creator because this was created solely by my girlfriend,” he said, stressing the words ” girlfriend” and “solely“.

“You still call her your girlfriend? She dumped you!”

“Even so, you don’t have a chance.”

While they bickered, a girl suddenly cried out, “Oh my God! What’s happening online? Looks like everything is flipping!” Margaret quickly pulled out her phone. A flood of new videos had appeared–all rehearsal footage of Rebecca choreographing. There was a complete timeline for Deer Cry, from initial concept to finished piece. There were progress videos for the phoenix themed Rebirth and early sketches of the entire Classic of Mountains and Seas series.

The earliest records dated back to the troupe’s European tour last year, when Rebecca’s leg hadn’t fully healed. She had choreographed, coached both Desmond and the Soliaridge Dance Troupe’s female principal, Helia Adams, and even performed a section during that tour.

The old program booklet from the performance was still available. Everything had been thoroughly documented.

Rebecca had posted on all her social accounts, both domestic and international, with the caption: [What’s real can’t be faked, and what’s fake can’t become real.]

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 584

In the banquet hall, Margaret’s hand shook as she held her phone.

The netizens were demanding proof. Since she claimed she had spent five years honing this piece, she should produce the evidence.

Margaret was certain this was a coordinated effort by paid trolls. She had used the same tactics before, now the boomerang had returned.

The glittering banquet was a vanity fair. When someone stood on top, everyone flattered them. But when an opportunity arose to pull them down, many would be happy to grab it.

Right there in the hall, someone spoke up. “Miss Shaw, the netizens are right. Produce the evidence and fight back.”

Margaret glared at the speaker, who sounded like he was on her side, but he clearly just wanted to watch her crash and burn.

Tiffany frowned. Before she could say anything, Margaret's friends jumped in with their scoldings.

"I'm just standing up for Miss Shaw," the man said innocently. "She is so talented after all. How can we let someone sling mud at her? She needs to hit back."

Margaret was speechless because she had zero evidence proving Phoenix in Flight existed before Rebecca's records. Her line of honing it for five years had only been hype.

"What's the matter, Miss Shaw?" the man smirked. "Don't tell me you don't have it."

He looked at her angry face and waved his phone triumphantly. "I'm not the one saying it. The whole internet is waiting for Miss Shaw to prove them wrong. A lot of people are starting to wonder if she has no evidence at all."

Margaret looked desperately at Desmond, hoping he would save her. Her dance material had originally come from videos on his phone. If he spoke up for her, the situation might turn around.

Her parents urged him. "Desmond, those videos she posted all include you. This production could count as a joint creation between the two of you, right?"

The Shaws were refined and couldn't demand it outright. They dropped a hint instead.

"Mr. and Mrs. Shaw have treated you like family since you were little," Sean chimed in. "We're like one family. When they need help, you should lend a hand."

The couple looked satisfied, and Margaret eagerly stared at Desmond.

"Are you sure you want me to release my videos?" he scoffed. "From start to finish, there's no trace of Margaret in them. But there is footage of Rebecca explaining the concepts and moves to Helia and me. If I post those, it won't be Rebecca's face getting slapped."

Sean waved it off. "Videos can be edited, and audio can be swapped. We're just asking you to say something to help ride out this wave of public opinion."

The Shaws nodded, eagerly waiting for Desmond's agreement.

"You all keep up with technology, don't you?" he chuckled. "There are plenty of experts and tech-savvy people online. They'll spot edited footage instantly. Then it won't just be my reputation on the line. Margaret will be in greater trouble."

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 585

Sean faltered when this might affect Desmond's reputation as weil, but Margaret's parents were furious at his explanation

They had been so enthusiastic about the marriage alliatice, yet he was dodging when they needed help.

The once–lively banquet hall cooled rapidly. The atmosphere became painfully awkward.

Guests began making excuses to leave. The Shaws had lost face but maintained their dignity, forcing smiles as they saw off the guests.

Meanwhile, the story was fermented online.

Helia, one of the original performers, finally got heard. She had defended Rebecca when Margaret first launched the attack, but her voice had been lost in the buzzi

Now people were finally listening. She released her videos of Rebecca discussing the Classic of Mountains and Seas series with her, along with a compilation showing Rebecca pushing through agonizing rehabilitation just to return to the stage.

Many were deeply moved by the footage of the girl sweating and trembling in pain. The reversal happened at a shocking speed.

While the Shaws were still in the banquet hall, public opinion shifted dramatically. Those celebrities' fans clashed, driving the hype to its peak.

Margaret refused to accept defeat. "Dad, Mom, pay to suppress the trending topics!"

Even at that point, she still believed money could fix everything.

"It's useless," Desmond said. "Feel free to try, though."

They mobilized their entire PR team and poured in serious money. Sadly, they could suppress one platform but not all. They could bury it domestically, but not internationally.

The next morning, when netizens noticed the topics had vanished, the backlash was total. Those who had been on the fence or leaning toward Margaret swung hard toward Rebecca.

Their reasoning was sound. If Margaret had evidence, she would have released it. Suppressing trends only proved guilt.

This new wave of fury was even bigger than before and far beyond what money could bury. Margaret finally panicked. Together with her parents, she went to the Schroeders to discuss solutions, mainly hoping to go through Desmond.

“Issue a public apology,” he suggested after much thought.

“No way!” Margaret shrieked. “She doesn’t deserve it!”

“Then I’ve got nothing.”

“Whose side are you on? Seriously? Are you still standing with her?”

“Who else? You?”

“Desmond!” Sean scolded, then added, “I’ve got an idea. We could reach out to Rebecca, talk terms, and get her to delete everything.”

He figured that since Rebecca’s cousin was building business connections in the States, there could be future mutual benefits. Margaret’s eyes lit up. “Yes! We’ll offer her money and make her admit she slandered me.”

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 586

Sean and Desmond were both tinned by her bold plan.

Margaret shook Erik’s shoulder excitedly. “Dad, let’s offer her a sum she can’t refuse

Erik seriously considered it, but Sean was skeptical. “Are you sure she’ll take the money?”

“She’s just a poor student,” Margaret said arrogantly. “Don’t talk to me about principles. Principles only hold when the money isn’t enough.”

“It might be worth a shot,” Erik agreed. “Even if she demands a fortune, we’ll pay it.”

Desmond simply sat there laughing.

“What’s so funny?” Margaret scowled.

“Well...” he continued laughing. “You can’t afford what she wants.”

“It’s just money,” Margaret sneered. “We can afford anything she asks for. Anything that can be solved with money isn’t a problem.”

Desmond sighed inwardly. The events in Soliaridge two years ago clearly hadn’t left much impression, on the Arelmoor elite, but he didn’t bother warning her again.

Even Sean stayed quiet this time, perhaps eager to see their humiliation.

Determined to prove her point, Margaret contacted Rebecca there and then. She had Rebecca’s number from her time in the troupe.

She didn’t care about the time difference, and the moment the call connected, she demanded, “How much do you want?”

Rebecca had been sleeping and was jolted awake by the provocative question.

“Money?” She had never imagined the matter would be settled with cash.

Mistaking her surprise for interest, Margaret sneered. “That’s right. Name your price. Then delete your posts and tell everyone you wrongly accused me. I’ll give you more than you could earn in a lifetime.”

Rebecca was furious. The only reason she could confront Margaret now was that she had both the truth and sufficient money. Anything Margaret could do with cash, she could do, too.

If it had been another girl in the troupe who wasn’t financially secure, she wouldn’t have been able to quickly.

Mentioning money now was an insult. She hung up immediately and blocked the number.

Margaret was livid. “She hung up on me! Who does she think she is, acting all high and mighty?”

“Try contacting her family and have them pressure her,” Erik suggested.

turp things around so

“Her family?” Margaret laughed mockingly. “A father who’s been to prison, a greedy mother, and a useless brother?”

“That’s perfect, then,” Erik said.

Before they could finish planning, Desmond's phone buzzed with a notification. Rebecca had posted again. He had been following her with a burner account.

He opened it with a raised eyebrow. "Don't bother. The chance of reversing this is basically gone. See for yourselves." Margaret checked Rebecca's account and found that the latter had posted the contract with the troupe, the breach–of–contract compensation agreement, and most damning of all, audio recordings of Margaret trying to poach several dancers.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 587

Just as Desinoud had predicted, there was no possibility of reversal this time.

Margaret and her parents were furious.

"Let's go," Erik said.

Since the Schroeders wouldn't help, they would figure something out on their own. Tiffany followed, seething, but Margaret wasn't ready to give up.

She glared at Desmond. "Didn't you hate her? Didn't she hurt you so badly? Why won't you stand with me? We're on the same side in this. You could get your revenge and help me at the same time."

Desmond's gaze grew distant. "When did I ever say I hated her?"

"You did when you first got back! You wouldn't even let anyone mention her. You'd explode and tell everyone to get lost. Said you never wanted to hear her name again!" Margaret recounted every detail like an accusation.

Of course, Desmond remembered. He remembered every bit of the love and madness he had poured into that relationship. He laughed, but it was filled with sadness. "Is that what you call hate? If so, then yeah, I guess I hated her."

"So, why are you still defending her at every turn?" Margaret yelled.

His gaze became heated. "Because I love her. Why does hate exist? Because of love. When you can't have what you love, it drives you crazy."

"But she hurt you! Wake up!" she screamed.

His smile became bitter. “If I could, I’d let her hurt me again. Too bad I can’t even do that anymore. She won’t even give me that chance.”

“Are you insane?” Margaret didn’t get it, but her heart ached so badly.

She had loved him for so many years, but he hadn’t cared. Yet someone who didn’t give a damn about him had him obsessed.

Desmond headed upstairs, muttering, “Insane? Yes, I am.”

Behind him, she shouted, “Wake up! You’re not insane, and you don’t love her. You’re just confused. What has she done to you, turning you into such a fool?”

He wiped his tears and walked up the stairs without responding.

“Snap out of it!” she cried. “I’m the one who loves you the most! I’m the one who’s crazy about you! I love you, and I hate you! But I can’t let you go. Even if you treat me like this, I still love you!”

She rushed out of the house.

Desmond returned to his room and opened his phone. His feed was flooded with the scandal. By now, public opinion had reversed almost completely.

The majority stood with Rebecca, rendering his earlier call a total joke. She didn’t need his help at all. She could turn the narrative around all on her own.

He had planned to stand up for her anyway, but now it was too late. He always seemed to be one step behind.

Back in school, he had wanted to confess, only to hear she already had someone she liked.

Later, he tried anyway. Who knew? Maybe it would work.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 588

But when Derdind getting married.

2d but dorm, Retered had already gone back to Soliaringe. He chased her there, only to learn she was

He was always late until fate finally gave him a chance to win her back. Yet in the end, he messed up.

If only during the Edinburgh Festival he had shown up sooner instead of being so stubborn, maybe she could have forgiven him.

If on the night she was attacked, he had gone to pick her up before Vance, maybe she wouldn't have broken up with him.

If he had spoken up sooner this time, swooping in like a superhero to clear away the rumors, maybe she would have forgiven him.

But he had missed that last chance, too. Not only had he failed to descend like a hero, but he had even tried to pressure her. Throughout the long stretch of online abuse, he had essentially been an accomplice.

He was late again. Yet even so, he had to carry out his plan.

He picked out several videos and drafted a post, typing and deleting it repeatedly until only a few concise sentences remained. After reading it many times, he finally hit send.

The videos showed Rebecca choreographing with Helia when her leg was still giving her trouble, then teaching the troupe members once she had recovered, encouraging them along the way.

The caption read: [From start to finish, it was all Rebecca Perry's hard work alone. I just wanted to be the male lead in her production. I'm sorry, I didn't even manage that role properly.

[I believe she will stand on even bigger stages one day. She is like a swallow in the clouds, a deer in the woods, a phoenix rising from the ashes, and so many more possibilities.]

He was a direct participant and the original male lead in the production. He appeared in every circulating video, and Margaret's paid articles had listed him as a co-creator.

Yet now, he publicly stated that it had been Rebecca's effort alone from beginning to end. What more was there to say?

Combined with Rebecca's overwhelming evidence, every insult previously directed at her now poured back onto Margaret and her troupe.

The working-class netizens couldn't understand Margaret's point of view Rebecca was someone with a physical disability who had fought her way back to dancing and built her own troupe.

Yet in the recordings, Margaret casually talked about using money to crush people and told them to dissolve the troupe for ten times the salary.

That condescending, entitled attitude disgusted many netizens.

[So, this is what rich people's arrogance looks like? We work our asses off for something, and she can just wave her hand and destroy it all?]

[It feels like an ant trying to shake a tree. You finally make a little progress, and someone just shakes the whole thing and knocks you right back to the bottom.}

[Rich heiresses should play their games in their own circles. Don't treat other people's dreams and life's work like toys!]

After returning home, the Shaws tried to figure out damage control. They thought they could swallow the loss, stay off the internet, and let people eventually forget.

After all, they didn't make their living from dance. Yet Margaret refused to let it go.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 589

Fimming, Margaret went onling to check the situation and immediately saw Desmond's statement.

The more she read, the more pain she felt.

"Why is he so obsessed? They aren't even together anymore. Why is he still publicly declaring his loyalty? Does he really think she would care? Is it worth it? Doesn't he feel embarrassed?"

Her parents saw her sobbing and were startled. They looked down at her phone and saw Desmond's post along with an even fiercer storm of outrage directed at their daughter.

Erik's chest heaved with rage. "That kid is hopeless! And we were thinking about setting you guys up. He's already acting like this before anything is settled. How could we ever rely on him?"

"He's just been tricked by that woman!" Margaret argued.

"You've lost it!" Erik turned to his wife. "You talk to her."

Tiffany hated seeing her daughter so upset. “Sweetheart, you can’t be blinded by love. Desmond is heartless and doesn’t deserve your feelings. What do you even see in him?”

“Does love need a reason?” Margaret shot back.

Ever since she was little, the adults had talked about her and Desmond as a destined match. Now it suddenly didn’t count?

In her eyes, nothing existed except Desmond’s post. She couldn’t even see the tidal wave of attacks raining down or her.

She forwarded his post and added her own comment. Her fingers moved fast over the screen, and once finished, she hit send without hesitation.

“What did you post?” Tiffany asked, unease creeping into her voice.

Margaret was already in the middle of a media storm; anything she posted now was supposed to be weighed carefully or, better yet, reviewed by the PR team.

Tiffany grabbed the phone from her hands.

The post read: [You’ve always wanted to be the lead in her story. You never once looked back to see that I wanted to be the lead in yours.]

Tiffany was shocked, but before she could react, Margaret snatched the phone back.

“What did you just post?” Tiffany snapped, pointing at the phone. “You’ve completely humiliated us! Delete it right now!”

Margaret cried harder and refused.

“You still have the nerve to cry? Do you realize what you’ve done?” Tiffany spluttered, her temples throbbing. “You’ve basically begged a man to notice you in front of the entire country.

“Do you have to stoop this low? If you want to get married, just say the word. There’d be a line of suitors. Why are you groveling like this?”

“I didn’t grovel! I just like him. Is that a crime?” Margaret countered. “I’m just telling him on equal footing and in front of everyone that I like him. What’s wrong with that? Isn’t this what you wanted?

“Weren’t you always pushing for us to get married? Now that it’s blown up and embarrassed you, it’s suddenly all

After venting her frustration, she grabbed her phone and started typing again.

Tiffany tried to snatch it. “What are you typing now? Don’t do anything stupid!”

my fault?”

Margaret ran to her room and locked the door. Tiffany panicked, taking out her phone to monitor Margaret’s account.

even more irreversible.

Margar Shaw, take full responsibility. Yes, I stole the concept for Phoenix in Flights from Rebecca Perry. I’ll own what I did. From now on, I’ll never performon stage again, and I’ll compensare Rebecca for all her losses.

[I apologize to her for the harm caused by the online attacks. I’m willing to face legal consequences. To all the dancers who performed in Phoenix in Flight, thank you, and I’m sorry. I won’t be able to dance with you anymore.

[I hope other troupes will evaluate you fairly based on your professional skills. The plagiarism and my personal issues with Rebecca are my problem alone. It has nothing to do with them. I

Tiffany nearly fainted

Margaret

Once that was posted, no PR team could salvage it, unless they claimed Margaret had mental issues. But they couldn’t bear to say that about the daughter they had spoiled since childhood.

Erik came over, noticed his wife’s pale face, and asked what was wrong. Tiffany wiped her tears and showed him the posts.

“This is all your fault,” she complained. “You kept on talking about setting her up with Desmond. Now he has turned into her obsession.”

Erik brushed it off. “Calm down. Stealing someone else’s choreography was wrong, to begin with. Now that she’s admitted it, apologized, and offered compensation, we can put this behind us.”

“Easy for you to say,” Tiffany argued. “Isn’t this humiliating? And what about the Schroeders? Desmond just humiliated Margaret right in front of everyone. She can quit dancing and stay off the internet, but she still has to stay in the circle.

“How will people look at her now? The marriage alliance with the Schroeders is dead. Do we still want to arrange another match? They’ll only laugh at us.”

“Now that you mention it,” Erik said thoughtfully, “maybe it’s time to steer her away from Desmond. We have plenty of close connections. There’s no shortage of outstanding young men.‘

He paused, then added, “Oh, right. Alessio mentioned heading to Soliaridge for a tech summit. There’s a talented young entrepreneur, Mr. Rossi, who just returned to start a company. He is rich and single. Maybe we could have Margaret go along?”

Tiffany nodded. “We’ll have to talk to her first.”

Margaret’s posts undoubtedly sparked another huge uproar online. The Schroeders saw them, too: Joyce read the posts with mixed feelings.

Margaret is so stubborn, but in this aspect, she’s a good match for Desmond.”

v so?” Sean frowned, viewing the whole thing as a scandal.

he truly loves Desmond and would be devoted to him. They both have that same stubborn streak. Stealing the dance concept wasn’t classy, but that doesn’t conflict with her feelings for Desmond. Call it selfish if you want, but all parents in the world want someone to truly love their children.”

“So, what’s your plan?”

“Tomorrow, let’s pay them a visit.”

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 590

Margaret soon posted something even more irreversible. [I, Margaret Shaw, take full responsibility. Yes, I stole the concept for Phoenix in Flight from Rebecca Perry. I'll own what I did. From now on, I'll never perform on stage again, and I'll compensate Rebecca for all her losses. [I apologize to her for the harm caused by the online attacks. I'm willing to face legal consequences. To all the dancers who performed in Phoenix in Flight, thank you, and I'm sorry. I won't be able to dance with

My now. Margaret’s parents st ordert tu viut again Bearing gifts, they claimed they had come to check on Margaret held a deep gruder against Desmond

His public statement felt iike kicking them whil Margaret under the bus with that declaration was

Their attitude was therefore cold and distant they were down. Refusing to help was one thing, but actively throwing

Joyer, ever the social expert, pretended not to notice and chatted arniably as usual, exchanging pleasantries. Only after the conversation had warmed up did she bring up the real purpose of their visit.

“Why don’t we spend the New Yeanholidays together? It would give the young people more time to interact.”

“No need,” Erik refused flatly,

“Why not?” Joyce forced a smile. “You already have other plans?”

“Yeah.” Erik replied. “We’re heading to Soliaridge.”

“Solaridge?” Joyce muttered. “That sounds lovely. Desmond used to dance with the Soliaridge Troupe. Every time we’ve gone there, it’s been for business, so we’ve never had a proper chance to explore the area.”

“Sorry, but we’ve already made plans with someone. It wouldn’t be convenient,” Erik said, still nursing his resentment and rejecting her outright.

“Do you have relatives there? We’ve never heard about that before,” Joyce said, pushing for Desmond’s sake.

She wasn’t bluffing. The two families had been close for decades and knew each other’s family trees inside and out.

“No,” Erik answered, having only said that to spite them.

He hadn’t prepared a proper excuse. Since Joyce already knew their relatives so well, he decided to twist the knife for a little satisfaction.

“The current president of Rossi Enterprises invited our whole family down to Soliaridge. Margaret will be going too.”

“Mr. Rossi?” Joyce paused, surprised.

“That’s right,” Erik continued, ignoring his wife’s warning glance. “He’s going to invest in a tech company and gets along very well with Margaret’s brother. Mr. Rossi is single, and he once saw Margaret dance while she was abroad.

Joyce stayed quiet, choosing not to call him out, but Sean couldn’t hold his tongue. Although he had mainly come to apologize at his wife’s urging, Erik’s arrogant attitude had been grating on him.

“Didn’t he boot her off the stage?”

“What do you mean by that?”

“If you’re so close to him, don’t you know that…”

Just then, a voice cut in, “Dad, Mom.”

Margaret’s brother, Alessio Shaw, hurried in, but when he found the Schroeders were there, he clammed up.

“Whatever it is, just say it,” Erik said, still locked in his standoff with Sean. “Have you and Mr. Rossi nailed down the date for the summit yet?”

Alessio looked torn, and Sean said deliberately, “Should we step out for a moment?”

“Nanced There are no outsiders here,” Erik insisted. “Spit it out.”

Tiffany sensed something was wrong and tried to intervene, but Erik silenced her with a sharp glare,

Alessio sighed heavily. “How did Margaret get tangled up in so much trouble with Rebecca Perry?”

“What’s the problem?” Erik still didn’t think it was a big deal.

In his mind, Rebecca was just a dancer with no extensive connections.

“She is related to Mr. Rossi,” Alessio revealed. “If I show up at that summit, I’ll look like a complete joke. ”

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 591

Erik froze. “What? That’s impossible. Weren’t her parents a gambler and a greedy woman, and her only brother a complete loser?”

“Mr. Rossi is her cousin, and he spoils her rotten,” Alessio said bitterly. “How did we end up to this mess?”

Erik whipped around to glare at Sean. “You knew all along, didn’t you? You were just watching me make a fool of myself?”

Of course, Sean knew. Desmond had been in love with Rebecca and familiar with her fareily.

Losing his face so badly caused Erik to completely lose his composure. He could tolerate embarrassment, but not in front of Sean.

He was about to kick them out when Joyce quickly mediated. “Come on, Erik. We have known each other for so many years. Are we really going to fall out over something so small?

“You and Sean have been bickering since you were young. You know his temperament. He wasn’t deliberately hiding anything. he was about to remind you.”

Erik was still furious. “Sean, what are you trying to do here?”

This time, Sean didn’t disappoint his wife. He responded smoothly, “I just want us to bury the hatchet. We’ve been through so much together. The children had a misunderstanding, so let’s clear it up.

“If we did anything wrong, we apologize. Tell us whatever you need. Our friendship has survived decades of ups and downs; surely it can withstand this.”

Erik softened a little. “My dear daughter has suffered such a big grievance and is still refusing to come out of her room. It’s not about whether I forgive you. This matter ends when she feels better ”

“Let the children handle their own affairs,” Sean suggested. “If you trust me, let Desmond go upstairs and talk to her.”

Erik remained silent, and Tiffany stepped in to give her consent.

Margaret had known they were downstairs, but her father had forbidden her from coming down. She had been closely following the situation below. The moment she heard Desmond’s footsteps on the stairs, she opened the door and stood waiting for him.

She turned her head away, grumbling, “I thought you were going to cut me off completely.”

“I never really... had much of a relationship with you, to begin with,” he said slowly.

She wanted to throw him out but could not bear to. If he were driven mad, he might never return.

“Alright, alright, I came to apologize. I’m sorry.”

“You…”

Hearing this only made Margaret feel more aggrieved. Tears began falling uncontrollably.

“But I’m not apologizing for my statement. That was the right thing to do. The dance belongs to her; that’s a fact. I may be a despicable person, but I have a bottom line. Plagiarism is absolutely unacceptable.”

“Then why are you here? To lecture me? Save it. Rules don’t apply to me. I am the rule.”

“Look at the mess I’ve made of my life. Who am I to lecture anyone?”

“What mess? You’re a renowned principal dancer, and you excel at business too. You’re so outstanding. You have the right to do anything!”

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 592

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"What mess? You're a renowned principal dancer, and you excel at business too. You're so outstanding. You have the right to do anything!"

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 593

Desmond paused, then gave agulfer laugh. “How naive! you’re probably the only one thinking that way.” Margaret fell silent, her tears welling up again. “You’re good at everything except liking me ”

Desmond sat down on the floor, silent for a moment. “As I said, I came to apologize ”

Margaret turned away and wiped her tears.

Desmond continued, “This whole matter, from beginning to end, is my fault. I shouldn’t have let the video fall into your hands. I failed to safeguard my own files.”

“I stole it. It had nothing to do with you.”

“I allowed it to happen. I’m sorry to you, and I’m sorry to Rebecca. This is my fault.”

Mentioning Rebecca ignited Margaret’s anger once again.

“Why does she keep coming up? You know I can’t stand you being nice to other girls! I can’t stand you being with anyone else! Do you know how heartbroken I was when you got together with her?” Margaret huffed.

She jabbed a finger at her own chest. “When she tormented you until you came back looking broken? Do you know how much pain I felt here? I couldn’t even stay mad at you for one bit. What makes her think she can treat you like that?”

She burst into loud, heart–wrenching sobs. Desmond was stunned. It took him a while to react and offer her tissies.

She slapped them away. “I wanted to ruin her! I wanted

She stole you and then failed you!”

He tried to reason, “How I am... has nothing to do with her”

“You’re still defending her?” She glared. “I don’t want to hear it!

He threw up his hands. “Fine, you win. I’m leaving.”

She clenched her teeth. “Get out!”

After the visit, the relationship between the two families eased somewhat. When Erik saw them off, he was no longer fuming, but forgiving them was still difficult, let alone reconsidering marriage.

The shame still burned as he recalled how he had tried to use Mr. Rossi to humiliate the Schroeders earlier, only to end up embarrassing himself. He immediately told his wife to start arranging blind dates for Margaret.

Margaret happened to come downstairs just in time to hear this. She exploded. “I won’t! I’m not going on any blind dates!” “You stubborn girl...” Erik was so angry that he didn’t even know how to scold her.

Tiffany tried to persuade her. “Sweetheart, you’ve been one-sided for so long. If he doesn’t cherish you, he won’t.”

“No! He’s not that bad. He took all the blame on himself.” Margaret shook her head, showing her phone to her mother. Desmond had posted another statement regarding the Phoenix in Flight plagiarism allegations.

It read: [The choreography was created by Rebecca. I was once a member of her troupe. I knew the entire creative process and participated in the early rehearsals.

[After leaving the troupe for personal reasons and returning to the country, I passed the concept and choreography on to another troupe, where it was renamed Phoenix in Flight and performed both domestically and internationally.

[I hereby acknowledge that the plagiarism is true. All responsibility lies with me. I will bear all compensation and legal consequences. I sincerely apologize to everyone, especially to Ms. Perry.]

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 594

By shouldering all the responsibility himsex, Desmond drew every bit of online Are toward him.

“That’s his sense of responsibility as a grown man, and you’re touched?” Tiffany was strongly against her daughter loving someone so submissively. “There are plenty of good men in this world.”

Margaret snatched her phone back. “Yes, there are plenty of men, but there’s only one Desmond Schroeder!”

She ran out of the house.

“Where are you going? If you’re going to find him, I’ll...”

Tiffany shouted after her, but she didn’t look back.

She really was going to find Desmond. When she arrived at his company, he was in a meeting. So, she waited in his office.

When he returned and saw her sitting in his chair, he was irritated. “Who let you in here?”

She sprang up from the chair, rushed toward him, and threw herself into his arms, wrapping her arms tightly around his waist.

He held his hands up awkwardly. “What are you doing?”

“Thank you,” she whispered.

“For what?” He pulled her away. “Go home. I’m busy here.”

“I know that even though you’re always mean to me on the surface, you care about me deep down,” she muttered, waving her phone.

He realized she was referring to his statement. He said gruffly, “You’re wrong. I’m mean to you on the surface, and I’m mean to you in my heart, too.”

She ignored his words. She leaned on his desk with both hands and smiled at him. “I have to say, you do look like a proper CEO in that suit.”

“Get out of here now.”

“You really want me to leave? I actually came here for someone else.”

He remained expressionless, showing no interest.

“Rebecca.”

His brows shot up. “What else did you do to her?”

She gritted her teeth. “I knew it. The moment her name is mentioned, you get nervous. Am I that terrible?”

“Aren’t you? What exactly did you do to her?”

“Nothing. But she might have offended someone else.”

“What do you mean?”

“A woman named Catherine Welch contacted me while I was abroad.”

He shot up from his chair. “What? What did she want with you?”

His overt concern for Rebecca annoyed her, but she told him anyway.

“She wanted to work with me to harm Rebecca.”

“You agreed? What did she want to do?”

“Who de you think I am? Do I need to use someone else’s hand to deal with a person? Would I cooperate with some random nobody? That will only tarnish my reputation.

“Stop talking nonsense and just tell me. What did she say to you?” he urged, pulling out his phone to book a flight to Paris.

“I’m going with you. Book me one too.”

“What are you going for?”

“I just want to go. I’ll watch you and keep you from getting back together with ner.”

“Are you crazy? What does this have to do with you?”

He booked a flight for that night, planning to go home and get things ready.

She huffed, “If you don’t take me with you, I won’t tell you what Catherine said.”

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 595

The New Year was approaching.

Even though they were living abroad, for the Perry family, the holiday rere ained the most important festival of the year

It was especially true for Josette. During this season, she insisted on following all the traditional custums from back home These were things the hired help at Kaitlyn's house didn't know how to do, so the whole family all pitched in to help her. Rebecca hadn't started school yet, so she had plenty of time to assist Josette. They baked batches of cookies, strung up decorations around the windows, and even pulled out an old hand mixer to make dough for a homemade apple pie.

No one complained, "We can just buy premium imported stuff. Why bother making anything ourselves?" or "You can pick up ready–made desserts at any grocery store. Why go through all that trouble?"

Everyone just humored her traditions and enjoyed the process. Gabriel became fascinated with the old hand–crank grinder. He even looked up tutorials online and one morning got up early to try it himself–making fresh soy milk

After one sip, he couldn't stop raving. "This is on another level. It tastes so much better than those sold in the supermarket" Josette grinned from ear to ear. That night, she cooked a simple dish using the leftover pulp. Gabriel was wide–eyed. "What is this? I've never had anything like it."

He ended up eating almost half the plate. Rebecca felt warm inside. Having a family who never rained on fer parade was truly a blessing.

The busy preparations proceeded in an orderly fashion. Rebecca's and Josette's daily routines were regular–supermarket to home, mall to home, and market to home.

One day, after shopping at the mall, Rebecca and Josette took the elevator down to the underground parking lot. That was when Rebecca's phone rang with a call from Anna.

She answered, but the signal cut out the moment the elevator doors closed. She couldn't hear a word. When they reached the parking lot, Aaron told her to wait while he brought the car around.

She waited at the elevator with Josette and two bodyguards. She tried calling Anna back, but the signal was still terrible. Either the call wouldn't connect, or Anna's voice was too unclear to understand.

While she was on the phone, the elevator doors opened again. Vance rushed out and shouted, Rebecca!"

She stared at him with wide eyes, not understanding what he meant. At that exact moment, a car accelerated wildly toward them.

Everything happened too fast. The car window rolled down, and a gun emerged, aimed directly at Rebecca.

One bodyguard reacted quickly and shoved her aside. The bullet hit him instead. The other bodyguard kicked the gun out of the shooter’s hand, but the car hit him, sending him flying.

Even then, the car didn’t slow down. It continued charging at Rebecca. She was supporting Josette and had nowhere to escape.

In the nick of time, Vance threw himself in front of the car and was sent flying on impact. Aaron returned and fired together with the bodyguard on the ground. Bullets ricocheted off the car as it sped away.

The entire sequence took only a few seconds. Josette hadn’t even realized what was happening before the car fled. On the ground lay three people: the two injured bodyguards and Vance.

Aaron supported Josette with one arm while urgently calling for help. The signal was still poor, so he simply picked Josette up. Ms. Perry, follow me!”

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 596

Rebecca glanced back at Vance and the bodyguards lying on the ground, her heart twisting painfully. She bit her lip, then followed Aaron closely to the car. The gunshots had alerted security. Aaron shouted urgently, "Call 911 and an ambulance!"

Then he said to the three on the ground, "Hold on! I'll drive out and notify Mr. Rossi."

Josette was frightened and gripped Rebecca's hand tightly. "Becky, don't be afraid. It's okay now. The doctors and police will be here soon. They will be fine."

Rebecca pressed herself against the car window, watching the three figures grow smaller along with the incre security guards. Her mind buzzed, and her heart thumped violently

She clutched her chest and gasped for air. “Grandma, what about you? Are you okay?”

“I’m fine. It’s just...” Josette looked back.

The car had already pulled out of the parking lot, and the three people were no longer visible. She trembled. “How could this happen?”

No one knew how it had happened or who was behind it. A crime of passion? Premeditated murder?

Rebecca saw the gunman's face when the car window rolled down. It was someone she had never seen before.

The view brightened as the car emerged from the underground. Aaron had been speaking on the phone and could trally communicate clearly.

"Mr. Rossi, I'm sorry for my negligence. The ladies are fine, but Mr. Bradford and the two bodyguards are injured. We don't know the extent yet. I've already called the police and requested emergency services. Yes, understood."

After hanging up, Aaron turned around. "Mr. Rossi orders me to take you home."

"No, I'm not going home," Rebecca said, her head still buzzing

The earlier scenes of the bodyguard being shot and Vance being run over kept replaying. She covered her head with her hands, not knowing how to stop it.

Josette spoke up. "How can we go home with peace of mind? We don't know how badly Vance and the other two boys are injured.

Aaron was at a loss. He called Gabriel again and handed the phone to Rebecca.

"Becky, I understand how you feel, but we have no idea what the situation is over there," Gabriel started. "Aaron is the only one with you. If something else happens, he won't be able to handle it alone.

"The other bodyguards and Vance were hurt while protecting you and Josette. Don't let their effort go to waste."

Rebecca realized that if she refused to leave, Josette wouldn't go either. She couldn't selfishly drag Josette into danger

"Alright," she answered shakily. "We'll go back."

"I'll head over there right away and keep you updated," Gabriel promised. "Just stay home and wait for my call.

His steady voice gave her some strength, but staying calm was easier said than done.

Once they arrived home, Rebecca settled Josette in, but her heart was still burning with anxiety

Chapter sae

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 597

Every time she closed her eyes, Rebecca would hear the gunshots and the roar of the car engine. The image of them being run over by the car and the poot of blood after the bodyguard was shot kept flashing in her mind

Anna called, sounding extremely anxious. “Rebecca, where are you? Go home right now! Softene wants to hurt you! Rebecca wanted to speak, but the words stuck in her throat. She felt terribly sorry for Anna.

“Vance went to find you. Did you see him? How are you now? Are you okay?” Anma sounded worried about both of them

Rebecca didn’t know how to tell Anna. Her voice came out hoarse. “I’m sorry. Vance... he was hit by a car.”

She broke down, trying hard to hold back her tears. “I’m sorry, Anna. I’m so sorry.”

It took Anna a long time to process the news. “Where is he now? How bad is it?”

“I don’t know.” Rebecca covered her mouth, struggling to control her emotions. “I just got home. The attacker was crazy, shooting and driving toward us. Vance...”

The image of Vance being thrown into the air appeared in her mind again.

“I’m waiting for news right now. I’ll keep you updated about his situation,” she continued, trembling. “I’m sorry.”

After another long silence, Anna murmured, “Then... please let me know once you hear anything.”

Her voice was barely a whisper, as if all her strength had been drained from her.

“Okay,” Rebecca agreed quickly, then remembered something crucial. “Do you know who wants to hurt me?”

Anna drew in a sharp breath. “It’s someone named Catherine.”

Rebecca's heart sank. She didn't know whether Anna knew who Catherine was. It was better if she didn't. "Alright, I understand," she said quietly. "I'll call to check on the situation now and then let you know."

She hung up and called Gabriel, who answered quickly, "Becky."

"Where are you right now? How are the bodyguards and Vance?" she asked anxiously, her fingers gripping the tablecloth so tightly she tore holes in it.

"They've been taken to the hospital by ambulance. I'm on my way there now. The car that hit them had been stopped, and the

Γ driver was caught," Gabriel replied. "Aaron is heading to the police station. I'll keep you updated. From the preliminary investigation, today's incident seems related to Catherine Welch.

"She hasn't shown up yet. We're doing everything we can to find her. Until we do, don't leave the house. If you need to go anywhere, ask me first."

She could sense the urgency in his voice. "I understand. Can you tell me which hospital they're at?" "Why? You're not thinking of coming over, are you? Let's talk later when I get there." Gabriel hung up.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 598

Rebecca stared at frer phone, tying to text Anna, but the words blurred. Only when her tears fell onto the screen did she realize she had been crying

She wiped her eyes, cleaned the screen, and texted Anna that the three men had been taken to the hospital. She promised to ask for the location and let Anna know.

Just then, her phone rang again. She hesitated for a moment, then answered the call.

"Rebecca, where are you?" Denise sounded anxious.

"I'm at home," Rebecca replied, trying to keep her voice steady.

"Thank goodness." Denise sighed in relief. "Don't go out recently. If you have something urgent, make sure to bring extra bodyguards with you."

“Why?”

“Someone wants to hurt you. It’s Catherine. You have to be careful.”

“How do you know?”

“L...”

Before Denise could finish, the call was suddenly cut off. Rebecca grew worried, wondering if something had happened to Denise.

She quickly called back, and a male voice answered, “Rebecca.”

She realized it was Desmond. “Why are you there?”

“Of course, I came for you,” he replied smoothly. “Heed Denise’s advice, but don’t worry. I won’t let anything happen to you.”

Denise’s voice came from the background. “Wait, it seems something has already happened.”

The call was cut off again.

Rebecca had no time to dwell on why Desmond had come here. She only cared about the three injured people in the hospital.

She fidgeted and called Gabriel again. “Have you reached the hospital yet?want to go there.”

He was finally worn down by her persistence. “Wait a moment. I’ll make arrangements.”

He arranged for three cars full of bodyguards to escort her. On the way, Rebecca contacted Anna and picked her up.

The moment Anna got into the car, Rebecca’s guilt and fear reached their peak. She gripped Anna’s hand tightly, feeling as if her heart were being torn apart. “Anna, I’m so sorry. I really...”

Anna shook her head and pulled her into a hug. “You must have been terrified, right?”

The rest of Rebecca’s words stuck in her throat. What kind of angel was Anna? Even at a time like this, Anna was still worried about her.

“I feel so guilty, really...” Rebecca murmured in grave pain. “If things go wrong with Vance, I...”

“Don’t say that,” Anna interrupted, patting her back soothingly. “He will be fine. Don’t worry. It will be okay.”

Rebecca closed her eyes and silently prayed that Vance would be alright.

They arrived safely at the hospital. Gabriel was already waiting in the parking lot with his people.

“Tury are still in surgery,” he said, gripping Rebecca’s shoulders. “We don’t know the details yet, but no news is good news.”

At least, they were still alive, and it meant hope.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 599

Rebecca and Anna waited outside the operating rooms until it got dark.

The three injured men were finally wheeled out one after another. The first Sant, the bodyguard who had been shot. His shoulder was bandaged, but he was already conscious.

Aside from being a little pale, he looked in good spirits. He told Gabriel he was fine and was taken to his room. Next was the bodyguard who had been hit by the car.

His leg was in a cast, and his condition seemed fine. Rebecca stared at his casted leg, and a distant memory surged back like a crashing wave.

She grabbed Gabriel’s clothes tightly. “Will he end up lame?”

Bodyguards were human, not machines. He had simply taken a dangerous job. If he ended up disabled because of this, she’d carry the guilt for the rest of her life.

She was terrified because she had gone through something similar and knew the pain. Gabriel patted her hand, went to ask the doctor for details, and came back.

“The doctor said in theory he won’t. Don’t worry,” he reassured her.

Rebecca nodded, but her anxiety grew again. She hadn’t expected Vance to be the most seriously injured.

“From the scene, after hitting the first person, the car not only didn’t slow down but actually accelerated,” Gabriel explained.” Vance took the full force of the impact. He was thrown against a pillar and then hit the ground. The car even ran over him as it sped away.”

Rebecca closed her eyes and shook her head desperately, too terrified to recall that moment. She couldn’t imagine what Vance would look like when he came out.

It could be like her when she had saved him years ago. Or even worse. She didn’t get to see him come out because he was taken straight to the ICU.

She froze at the news, her hand loosening, and her bag slipped to the floor without her noticing. Back when she was injured seven years ago, she hadn’t been sent to the ICU. Vance’s condition now was even worse than she thought.

Her heart clenched. She turned to look at Anna, afraid the latter couldn’t take it.

“Anna?” She endured the pain and gently hugged Anna, who stood there in a daze. Guilt whipped at her conscience, mixing with a strange, aching tightness in her chest.

She held Anna close, pressing her forehead against Anna’s as a soft sob escaped. “Anna, I’m sorry. I will do everything in my power to save him. I’m so sorry.”

Tears welled up in Anna’s eyes. She shook her head numbly, her voice hoarse and broken. “It can’t be cured. It can’t be cured...” “No! It’s not true!” Rebecca cried desperately. “Even though he’s in the ICU, there’s still hope. There has to be hope! Look at me. I used to be lame, but I’m fine now. I can run and jump normally, and I can even dance.”

The emotions she could no longer hold back poured out in Anna’s embrace. Vance’s injuries were far more serious than hers had been back then.

She felt so regretful. Even though she had cursed him before, she never wanted him to die or go through the same pain.

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford (by Koi Fish)

Chapter 600

Since Vance had been sent to the ICU, they couldn’t visit him.

It took Gabriel great effort to persuade Antia and Rebecca to go home. Rebecca was deeply worried about Anna, who had been in a daze the entire time, seemingly unable to accept what had happened to Vance.

Rebecca had many things she wanted to say-aporagies, promises, guarantees-but none of them would come out.

When they left the hospital building, Anna started walking away and ever forgot to get into their car.

“Anna...” Rebecca called out.

Anna turned around in a trance.

Rebecca almost cried. “Why don’t you stay at my house for a while?”

She was worried that Anna wouldn’t be able to handle the shock alone. But Anna gave a faint smile and shook her head.

Rebecca’s heart twisted painfully. “Come stay with us. We can keep each other company, and if you need anything, we can help.”

Anna shook her head again. “No, I should go home.”

Rebecca insisted, “Then let us take you home.”

“I’ll take the subway,” Anna declined, turning to leave.

“Anna!” Rebecca chased after her. “Are you mad at me?”

After all, Vance had been hurt trying to save her his ex-wife. That had to be another layer of pain for Anna. Even though it wasn’t intentional on Rebecca’s part, it was still the truth.

Anna shook her head and even reached out to tidy Rebecca’s messy hair.

“How could I? You’re so adorable, and you dance so beautifully. We have no grudge against each other. Why would I be mad at you?”

“But Vance got hurt because of me...”

Anna reached out to cover Rebecca’s mouth, her eyes misting over.

“Don’t say that. You are his unresolved knot, and so is your leg. I think if he could resolve all the entanglements in this way, might feel much lighter.”

he

Rebecca was totally lost, not sure of Anna's meaning. Entanglements? Had she misunderstood because of the language barrier?

"Do you mean he has finally resolved all the entanglements between him and me?" she asked.

Anna thought for a moment, then nodded. "You could say that."

Rebecca's grip loosened as Vance's past words echoed in her mind.

"I won't divorce her. I will support her for the rest of my life. This is what I owe her."

"I will treat her well. I'll give her the best things in the world-a big house and more money than she can spend. This is what I owe her."

"You don't understand. She is my responsibility, and I will carry it for the rest of my life."

Had he finally settled everything with her now? He owed her nothing anymore,

"It's fine. I can go back by myself. I still need to buy a few things. Bye." Anna waved and ran off.

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Anna thought for a moment, then nodded. "You could say that."

Rebecca's grip loosened as Vance's past words echoed in her mind.

"I won't divorce her. I will support her for the rest of my life. This is what I owe her."

"I will treat her well. I'll give her the best things in the world-a big house and more money than she can spend. This is what I owe her."

"You don't understand. She is my responsibility, and I will carry it for the rest of my life."

Had he finally settled everything with her now? He owed her nothing anymore.

“It’s fine. I can go back by myself. I still need to buy a few things. Bye.” Anna waved and ran off

She looked sal, yet somehow not entirely sad. Pebecca couldn’t figure her out anymore.

“I’ll have people follow and protect her. Let’s gb,” Gabriel said, coming over.

Rebecca looked at him through misty eyes. “People always talk about karma and the cycle of cause and effect. Does this count? Does it have to be resolved like this?”

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