

Five Years of Marriage to Mr. Bradford

Chapter 81

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“You can take care of it,” Rebecca said, heading out without having breakfast.

Instead, she bought a glass of milk and a pancake at a stall. After finishing them, she took a cab to the hospital for her treatment session. When it was over, her phone rang with a call from Vance.

She answered, and his voice came through the line, laced with urgency. “Rebecca, where did I put my brown folder?”

“I have no idea,” she replied coolly.

“I tucked it into the suitcase’s compartment. Where did you put it?” His tone sharpened with frustration. “I need it right now for this meeting.”

Grabbing her bag, Rebecca thanked the doctor and left the consultation room. Only then did she reply unhurriedly, “The suitcase? I didn’t touch it.”

“You didn’t?” Vance sounded stunned. He hurried to the entryway and spotted the suitcase still sitting there, untouched. “I left it right by the front door. You didn’t see it?”

“Oh, I did.” She stepped out of the hospital and strolled down the street.

“And you didn’t unpack it?” His voice was thick with disbelief.

“Nope,” she replied matter-of-factly.

“Where are you? Why do I hear music in the background?” he demanded, his words clipped and tense.

“Out shopping.” She spotted a cozy café nearby with outdoor seating, the soft tunes drifting from its speakers—the source of what he’d heard.

“Shopping? How are you managing that?” he pressed.

She stepped inside the café, where a waitress in a black uniform politely guided her to a table.

“What, aren’t limping people allowed to go shopping?” she countered.

Silence hung on the other end for a long beat. Finally, he spoke again. “Why didn’t you take care of my suitcase?”

He was really fixated on that stupid suitcase, wasn’t he?

“Didn’t feel like it.” She settled into her seat and scanned the menu.

The handwritten menu featured elegant script and charming little illustrations that lifted her mood. But the nagging voice on the phone grated on her nerves.

He rambled on, “Are you still upset about the plane thing? Why have you been so quick to snap lately? You’re blowing things out of proportion. Cathy...”

Rebecca hung up abruptly, sick of hearing that name, his excuses, and his voice altogether.

She ordered a sweet cappuccino and a slice of passion fruit and lemon cake. As the tangy flavors melted on her tongue, a memory bubbled up uninvited: an evening from her sophomore year of high school.

She’d been heading from the dorm to class when she caught sight of Vance under a camphor tree at dusk, in his school uniform, blowing on a leaf to whistle a popular song.

The boy’s silhouette cast a rainbow-like glow in her memory, a reminiscence of her youth that tasted like passion fruit and lemon.

Getting back to her dorm meant passing right by him, and she’d frozen, unsure if she should shatter that twilight scene.

Spotting her, he tossed the leaf aside with casual coolness. “If you’re heading through, just go already.”

She glanced around to make sure he was talking to her, and her heart thumped like a drum. His voice mirrored the leaf’s tune, clear and captivating.

That rush of first love had been genuine. And now, this deep indifference felt just as real.

Yes, she didn’t love him anymore. It turned out love could flip to nothing in the blink of an eye.

Looking back, she wished their connection had ended right there—a perfect, untouched snapshot of adolescence.

Support

Share

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Chapter 82

That evening could have remained a timeless, vibrant memory of her youth, instead of five years of marriage wearing down her long-buried crush until it was ground to dust.

Rebecca took her time in the café, savoring every sip of coffee and bite of cake before heading off to catch a movie.

By the time the credits rolled, the afternoon was already well underway. Having skipped lunch, she hailed a cab to a pizza shop.

One bite, and satisfaction surged through her as the savory cheese burst across her taste buds. With that, her plans for the day were complete. Feeling quite full, she decided to stroll through the alley to digest her meal.

The alley was packed with quirky shops, each more fascinating than the last. She meandered along, soaking it in. Spotting a group of young women lining up at a cake shop, she joined the queue just for the fun of it.

Amazingly, no one seemed to notice her limp—or if they did, there were no weird stares or pitying glances.

As she stepped outside, holding her cake, an unexpected wave of emotion hit her.

Breaking free from Vance's stifling world hadn't been as hard as she'd imagined. Outside his circle's constant jabs about her disability, strangers didn't carry that kind of spite.

With the cake tucked safely under her arm, she flagged down a cab home.

Only Nancy was there; Vance was nowhere in sight, as usual.

"Ma'am, how would you like dinner prepared?" Nancy asked, ready to start cooking.

"You don't need to run the menu by me anymore," Rebecca replied, holding up the cake.

Her time there was running out, and she wasn't sure if Vance would keep Nancy on after she left.

Seeing Nancy's bewildered expression, she sighed under her breath. "From now on, just cook whatever you enjoy. Make the dishes you like."

"But..." Nancy seemed shocked. What kind of housekeeper cooked according to her own tastes?

“I’m serious,” Rebecca said, placing the cake on the table.

Then she headed to her room for a quick shower and fresh clothes. Feeling renewed, she sat down to jot notes about her day. Today marked Day 19 of her countdown. She’d explored the alleys, sipped coffee, caught a film, and savored pizza—all the things she’d wanted to do for five years but never got around to.

It turned out that if she wanted to do something, she could just do it solo.

In the early days of their marriage, she had envisioned going on dates with Vance, watching films, and dining out together. For instance, when he had nothing to do during breaks, she’d suggest, “There’s a new flick out that’s getting great reviews. Want to check it out?”

He would say, “I’ve got plans. With your condition, it’s probably best to skip it. You can stream it down the line anyway.” Other times, she would ask, “I heard about this amazing pizza shop. Free this weekend to try it?”

He would excuse himself with a client meeting or his plans to hang out with his friends.

Every time she sought his opinion with hope, he would brush it off. And that pattern went on for five years.

Today, she’d done it all on her own, warmed by strangers’ simple kindness. She’d wrapped up those five years with her own perfect bow.

Midnight came, and Vance still wasn’t back. Day 19 of the countdown slipped away.

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Chapter 83

On Day 18, her passport arrived in the mail, and Day 16 marked her scheduled visa appointment. Time had flown by in a blur.

That morning, she woke up early, but Vance was already up and at it. She heard him rummaging around the room before he headed out.

She waited until he left before getting out of bed. With her interview set for the afternoon, there was no rush. After breakfast, she pulled out the folder with her visa documents and double-checked everything.

Once she confirmed that all the items were in order, she pulled out her handbag.

That was when she noticed her passport was gone. She distinctly remembered putting it in the bag the day before. She searched every pocket, but it was gone.

Her thoughts jumped to Vance and his mysterious morning activity. Had he taken it?

She called him right away, and he picked up on the first ring, his tone flat. "Hello?"

"Where's my passport?" she asked urgently. "Did you take it?"

"Yes," he admitted without missing a beat.

"What do you need my passport for?"

"Why are you hunting for it now?"

"That's none of your business. Just give it back."

Her frustration bubbled

"Where are you head. ver, but he dodged, pressing about why she needed it.

off to this time?"

"To see some apartments."

He fell silent, then said, "Come over."

"Where? The office? You expect me to trek to your office for my passport?"

"Yes, come on over."

"What are you really up to with it?" she pressed, already slipping on shoes by the door, ready to head out.

"Just sorting some asset stuff," he said casually.

That finally convinced her. It wasn't the first time something like this had happened.

Vance had always been open about money. Several properties were even in her name. But it wasn't cause for celebration; his motives were always about making up for things.

She hailed a cab and headed straight to the company.

It had been nearly five years since her last visit, and the place stirred up anxiety. Her one prior trip there had been a nightmare. The receptionist was new and didn't know her.

"Hello, you need an appointment to see Mr. Bradford. Got one?"

The classic appointment hurdle... She texted Vance to let him know she was at the front desk, but he didn't reply. Her following call also went unanswered.

She had no choice but to introduce herself, but the receptionist stared at her wide-eyed, "Mrs. Bradford? If every woman who showed up like that claimed to be his wife, Mr. Bradford would have wives lining up around the block."

"I'm the real deal. Please check with him," she insisted, wondering if Vance really had so many visitors or if the receptionist was just patronizing her.

"Check with him for every single one? He'd spend his whole day dealing with phonies like you," the receptionist muttered, rolling her eyes.

Rebecca's brow furrowed. "Phonies? Like who?"

"Desperate social climbers like you, looking for a free ride," the receptionist sneered. "At least the others show up looking put-together. A gimp thinks she has a chance? Talk about clueless."

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Did birds of a feather really flock together? Why did strangers outside Vance's world never bat an eye at her limp, while everyone in his orbit oozed hostility?

"I suggest you verify," she said, not wanting to hassle a desk jockey. "Your job is to help visitors, not insult them or turn away potential clients. I don't want to file a complaint."

"Then act like one—a real client or guest"

Rebecca couldn't wrap her head around it. "st," the receptionist countered, but picked up the phone to call the executive assistant, explaining the situation.

Whatever the reply, her chin jutted out smugly. "Knew it! My radar for gold-diggers is spot-on. Types like you should buzz off. Or I'll call security. The assistant has never heard of you."

"Oh really?" Rebecca stayed cool.

With her visa on the line, she'd packed every document, marriage certificate included. "Then tell me, who is his real wife?" "Sorry, gold-digger, but I'm just a hardworking employee," the receptionist scoffed. "I don't pry into Mr. Bradford's personal life, unlike some who'd sell their dignity to get ahead, impersonating his wife. Where do you get the nerve? From that limp? Scram, or I'm calling the police!"

“Go ahead,” Rebecca said evenly. “They’ll sort out who I am more quickly than I produce my marriage certificate.” “Marriage certificate?” the receptionist snorted. “That’s rich. You think Mr. Bradford’s blind enough to marry a cripple?” The elevator doors slid open just then, and a woman in sharp business attire stepped out.

“Ms. Browning,” the receptionist greeted, snapping to attention.

Rebecca recognized the woman as Vance’s secretary, Kimberly Browning. Though her grasp on the company was shaky, she knew Kimberly had been there for five years.

“Ma’am, I’m Mr. Bradford’s secretary. This way, please,” Kimberly said, leading her toward the elevator.

They rode up to the top floor, where Vance’s office was.

“Mr. Bradford is currently in a meeting, so please wait here.” Kimberly showed her into a small conference room. “Make yourself comfortable. I’ll get you something to drink.”

Two minutes later, she returned with a glass. “Passion fruit lemon juice. Does that work for you?”

“Yeah, thanks,” Rebecca replied.

“Hang tight. I’ll let him know once the meeting wraps,” Kimberly said with a smile, shutting the door behind her.

Rebecca waited. Ten minutes passed. Twenty... Half an hour...

She watched the minutes tick by, feeling restless. Finally, she stood up to open the door, only to find it locked from the outside.

This was trouble; her visa appointment was that afternoon.

She started calling Vance frantically. The line connected, but no one spoke.

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Rebecca realized this had to be a setup, but there was no time to guess who was behind it or what their motives were. Her visa window was closing fast.

Surveying the top-floor room, she concluded that jumping out the window was a non-starter. Instead, she dialed the company numbers saved in her phone, starting with reception.

“Help! I’m locked in the top-floor conference room! Send someone, please!” she shouted when the line connected.

The same receptionist snorted, “Tried to hit on Mr. Bradford and got busted by security? Ha, you had it coming!”

Then the line went dead.

Rebecca also had Aiden’s and Lucas’s numbers-exchanged back when they had first met, despite the bad blood. As expected, neither answered. They’d never been in her corner.

She slumped down, her hands shaking as she fired off an email to cancel her visa slot. Then she picked up the glass and downed it in one gulp.

Her face started itching almost immediately. This wasn’t passion fruit, not by a long shot.

Tentnored minutes ticked by, but Kimberly still hadn’t returned. Worse still, no one else knew she was stuck there.

The building hummed with normal activity until the top-floor smoke alarm blared, setting off a chain of sirens everywhere. “What’s happening?”

People poured out of offices, their voices overlapping in confusion.

“Smoke! Fire!” someone yelled. “Call the fire department! Now!”

Vance heard it too and rushed out, spotting wisps of smoke from the small conference room.

“Fire in the conference room. Good thing no one’s using it today,” a staffer said breathlessly. “The fire department is on the way.”

“How the hell did this start? What is security doing?” Vance barked, his unease spiking.

His ears then picked up rapping sounds, like someone was banging on the door.

“What is that noise?” Vance hurried toward the conference room.

Sure enough, it was coming from inside. Someone was slamming against the door.

“Who’s in there?” he shouted.

Catherine appeared out of nowhere, clinging to his waist. “Vance, don’t go in. It’s dangerous!”

“Someone’s trapped!” he snapped.

A weak voice drifted through. “Vance... help me...”

Vance’s blood ran cold. “Rebecca? Is that you?”

He shook off Catherine’s grip and kicked the door with all his might. “Somebody! Get this open, now!”

With a massive crash, the door burst inward.

Heat poured out instantly. Flames had consumed half the table and were creeping up the walls, devouring posters. Rebecca lay slumped by the door, barely hanging on.

“Rebecca!” He scooped her up fast. “Call an ambulance!”

His bellow echoed across the floor, jolting her awake. She opened her eyes weakly, staring at his familiar yet distant face. She lifted a hand to touch it but let it fall, managing a faint smile. “If I die... you won’t owe me... anymore... You’ll be free... Vance... goodbye.”

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“I’ve got you! I’m taking you to the hospital!” Vance cradled her and bolted to the elevator.

Rebecca said goodbye to him and closed her eyes, the smile lingering on her face.

In the elevator, he stared at her shut eyes, slamming the buttons as if it would speed things up.

“Rebecca, stay with me! Don’t sleep!” he shouted frantically.

Finally, they reached the first floor. Firefighters arrived sooner than expected, but Vance had no time to care about the flames.

He bundled Rebecca into the car and raced to the nearest hospital.

She came to when they arrived. The doctor immediately conducted a detailed examination. Luckily, there were no burns, but rashes covered her face, smeared with soot into a messy blotch.

After cleaning her face with a swab, the doctor said, “These look like an allergic reaction, and that fainting spell was probably from the allergy too.”

After a pause, he added seriously, “Passing out from an allergy in a burning room? That’s a recipe for disaster. How did that happen?”

Vance was still reeling. “Allergy? Rebecca, what set it off?”

She lay silently on the observation bed.

“Keep her under watch. A few results are still pending. We’ll wait for those before making any conclusions,” the doctor said before leaving the room.

Gray streaks lingered on her skin, though her face had been wiped clean. Vance sat beside her, gently dabbing her face with an alcohol-soaked swab.

She winced under the sting, turning her head away.

“I’m just cleaning it. Dirt can lead to infection,” he cooed.

Her eyes welled up, the words hitting like echoes from the past.

During those early days after her leg injury, he had said something similar, “Hold still, Rebecca. Let me clean the wound. Bacteria can cause an infection.”

It was that gentleness and this pretense of caring that had filled her with hope, pushing her to invest five precious years of her life into this marriage.

He must have felt disgusted while tending to her back then. Otherwise, why had he never dared to look at her scars? Now he was doing it again. What was his game? She didn’t buy it anymore.

“Don’t fidget. Let me put on some ointment,” he coaxed, holding the anti-allergy cream. “I remember mango sets you off. Did you eat them before heading to the office? How could Nancy buy mangoes? Did you snag a mango cake on the way?”

He spoke in a tone meant to soothe a child.

A nurse came in to start her IV, chuckling, “Such a loving husband, coaxing you like a child!”

That was right. He had played that role for five years.

Rebecca kept her lips sealed until the nurse left, then said firmly, “No mango cake. I’m calling the police.”

“Why?” Vance frowned.

Just then, a rustle came from outside the room. He looked over and saw Catherine arriving.

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Catherine peeked inside, then quickly pulled back.

“I’ll check it out,” Vance said, stepping out.

Catherine stood there, nervously holding a bouquet. “How is Rebecca? I came to visit her, but I’m worried she wouldn’t want to see me.”

“She’s fine. Just needs some rest,” Vance replied, knowing the tension. “I’ll pass on your thoughts. She’s not in a great headspace right now. Maybe you should head back for now.”

“Okay.” She nodded, not really there for Rebecca anyway.

Her goal was always Vance.

She pressed her lips together, her eyes welling up. “I’m sorry. As your assistant, I messed up my job and put Rebecca through hell. Thankfully, she is fine, or I’d never forgive myself.”

Rebecca heard it all from the observation room. It sounded like Catherine had joined the company as Vance’s assistant, which meant traveling and appearing together all the time.

Suddenly, it made sense how things had turned out that way.

Outside, Vance comforted her. “We don’t know the full story yet. Once I get Rebecca settled, I’ll look into it.”

“Aiden and Lucas have already investigated,” Catherine sniffled. “It was the wires in the conference room catching fire. Must have worn out somehow. Should have checked them. I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault. You’re not an electrician. What would you know?” he reassured her. “Head home. I’ll handle things here until the firefighters finish their investigation.”

“Alright.” She nodded. “Could you give Rebecca the flowers? It’s from the crew and me. Even if she doesn’t like us, we hope she gets better soon.”

Rebecca sneered at Catherine’s skills to distort the truth and Vance’s stupidity.

Catherine had a science degree, so how could she not know about faulty wiring?

Even Rebecca knew better. In fact, she had spotted the issue while trapped. Someone had deliberately sliced through the insulation, and she had tried calling for help.

After her first pleas had gone ignored, she had noticed the wiring problem and made another round of calls, including to Vance. If even one of them had answered, the fire would not have occurred.

Hatred boiled over. What had she done to deserve this? Hadn't she already floated divorce?

She'd made up her mind to leave. In two weeks, she'd cut all ties, say goodbye to the past, and hand back their perfect little world that excluded outsiders. This deadly trap was unnecessary.

But since they were ruthless, she had decided to flip the script and not let them off the hook.

The room had smoke detectors; any whiff would trigger them.

Allergic to mangoes, she had picked up the scent instantly. When the cup had been placed in front of her, she had instantly recognized that it wasn't just passion fruit lemon juice. There had to be mango juice mixed in.

'They'd laid the bait, and she'd bite. She had called the fire department first because she needed real help, with the wires in the room already sparking.

Chapt

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Someone had wanted her to chug the mango juice, an attempt to knock her out cold so the fire could burn her alive.

Aware, she had taken the bait, drinking it. If they were gunning for a crime, she'd hand them the rope.

From her experience with mango allergies, she'd only break out in hives and would not pass out. So, why did they bet on her fainting? It had to be Vance's intel.

Once, early in the marriage, she'd accidentally eaten a mango cake and broken out badly. Hiding her rash-covered face, she'd faked sleep in the room and ignored his knocks.

Nancy had freaked out and ranted about allergies causing shock. Losing no time, Vance had busted the door down, seen her out cold, and truly thought she had gone into shock.

Rebecca didn't know if it was one person or the whole gang after her life. Either way, mangoes wouldn't kill her or knock her out. She had just played along and delivered that theatrical line: "If I die, you won't owe me anymore."

Anyone could play the pity card. But once in the hospital, she stopped pretending, unwilling to waste the doctors' time over a rash.

Outside the observation room, Vance and Catherine were still talking.

Rebecca sat up, spotting her bag on the table, and reached out for it. Vance saw it and hurried back in. "What do you need? I'll get it for you."

Catherine lingered, peeking into the room, as Rebecca retrieved her bag, opened it, and pulled out her phone, which was still on.

"What do you want the phone for?" Vance asked.

"I told you, I'm calling the police," she replied, unlocking it.

"We already called the fire department. They'll figure out the cause," he reasoned. "But why were you in that conference room? And how was the door locked? You haven't explained."

"I'd like answers" she said coldly. "Police investigation will clear it up for everyone."

Catherine burst in, frantic. "Rebecca, think twice. The company is in a big push right now; involving the police could tank our reputation. That fire was just an accident."

"How do you know it was an accident?" Rebecca sneered. "Did you lock the door?"

Catherine paled. "No, I asked around. Kimberly took you there and made mango juice. She swears she didn't lock the door, having no clue how it happened."

"Mango juice?" Rebecca zeroed in on her flustered expression. "I never mentioned mango juice. How did you know?"

Catherine's eyes darted. "I... I checked some details before coming. It's my job as Vance's assistant. Kimberly filled me in on escorting you up and leaving you to wait in the meeting room."

"Is that so?" Rebecca raised an eyebrow, turning to Vance. "Not many people know about my mango allergy. Not even my parents."

Only Vance knew.

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Vance stiffened, but Rebecca stayed eerily calm.

“Kimberly swore it was passion fruit lemon juice,” she said. “How did it turn into mango juice? Did she spike it, or did someone swap it? And Vance, who did you tell about my allergy?”

Catherine went white as a sheet, but before she could say anything, Rebecca pressed on. “Who locked the door? There are surveillance cameras; a quick check will clarify everything, unless it’s tampered with or deleted. All things considered, involving the police is necessary. I’m calling them now.”

The two were ready to protest, but she continued, “This was attempted murder! Anyone blocking me is in on it!”

Colors drained from Catherine’s face, while Rebecca glared at Vance. “I was almost burned alive at your company, and you’re against calling the police? Covering for someone?”

“No, it’s not like that.” He squeezed his eyes shut. “You’re suspecting Cathy?”

Her jaw tightened. “I’m not suspecting anyone. Just want the truth. No one can stop me here.”

“No, I didn’t,” Catherine sobbed. “How could I harm her?”

Vance gripped Rebecca’s shoulders. “Exactly! She wouldn’t...”

“Then why balk at the police?” Rebecca cut in. “If she’s clean, wouldn’t reporting it help prove her innocence?”

“Rebecca...”

“Enough, Vance! Anyone with a conscience would prioritize life and justice over personal feelings. If you choose to protect her, fine. I won’t argue. But this is about my survival, not our relationship or yours with her. Years ago, I saved someone’s life. If the repayment is losing my own, I won’t accept it, and neither will justice!”

Done with their sappy back-and-forth, she grabbed her phone and unlocked it decisively. Reporting this and uncovering the truth was non-negotiable.

“Rebecca!” Catherine burst into tears. “Vance, please, don’t call the police.”

He was stunned, his face crumbling. “Did you really...”

She lunged forward, clinging to his arm like a lifeline. “I’m sorry, Vance. I didn’t mean to. I–I just wanted to play a prank on her.

“A prank?” Rebecca scoffed. “Your crew loves those, huh? In my 20–something years, I never knew pranks could turn deadly.” “No, no...” Catherine shook her head vigorously. “Vance, hear me out. I’d never hurt her for real. I can’t even squash a bug. I just wanted to rattle her a little. She can’t stand us, so I figured I’d stick up for you by making her look silly in front of everybody. That’s why I told Kimberly to serve the mango juice. I swear, I only wanted her to show up with a rash all over her face.”

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“Everyone has poured so much into the company to get where we are today, and she just lounges at home, reaping the rewards while stirring up trouble for you, Aiden, and Lucas,” Catherine cried, her breath hitching between sobs. “I tried to be friendly, to smooth things over, and to play peacemaker. But she shuts me down and snaps at me until I hit my breaking point. Why does she get whatever she wants from you? In a dumb moment, I locked her in to stall her meeting with you. I never expected a fire.”

Rebecca wasn’t impressed, betting Vance would push for forgiveness next.

“Vance, I swear I’ll never do it again. I’ll toe the line from here on out. Can you forgive me?” Catherine whimpered, her tears slashing down and drenching his sleeve.

Rebecca gave a thin smile. “You’re barking up the wrong tree. I’m the one who got hurt. Why beg him?”

“But...” Catherine peeked at her meekly. “I know you can’t stand me; you’ll never let this slide. I’m truly sorry. I’ll make it right, paying your medical bills and covering your emotional distress. That works? Can you forgive me?”

“Make it right?” Rebecca’s face twisted in amusement. “With Vance’s cash?”

Catherine’s face flushed crimson, despair spilling over, as if she were the one who had nearly died in that fire.

Vance drew in a deep breath. “Rebecca, it’s not like that...”

“Then what is it?” Rebecca fired back, sensing he was already sold on Catherine’s story.

In his book, she was a fragile angel who couldn't hurt a fly, and her stunt was just a misguided act of loyalty, standing up for him and their friends against Rebecca, the troublemaker.

"She's offering compensation..."

"With your money? She rants about the company being your and your people's hard work while I am reaping the benefits. Isn't she doing the same? What makes her deserve that special assistant gig? Or the house and the jewelry you bought her?"

"Rebecca!"

She looked at his twisted face, knowing she had hit a nerve. She'd been throwing darts in the dark, but his reaction betrayed him. He had really bought her a house.

She clammed up, staring at the duo with a mocking grin.

"Cathy just got back from abroad," Vance rushed to explain. "As her friends, we're just helping her get on her feet."

"Save it!" Rebecca shut him down. "I don't care if it's a rock-solid friendship or a steamy affair. Wires don't cut themselves. Fires don't spark out of nowhere. I want answers. Fairness. If she's really innocent, she can hold her head high with the police. Bawling here won't cut it. The world's not crawling with suckers like you, Vance. That level of stupidity takes up all the spots."

Catherine's wild claims might fool him, but they wouldn't work on her.

This was her first time flat-out calling him a sucker. Vance gawked at her, like he didn't recognize her anymore.