

ALINA

FINDING FOREVER AFTER THE FIRST IMPRESSION

I LOVE

My Last
Beyond the Interview



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Stories Matter

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Dedications

To Aubery—

For showing me my worth beyond the world's measure,
the beauty in imperfection and the possibility of love
after loss. You are the heart of this story, and the reason
it was ever written.

And to every quiet soul searching for someone who sees
them truly—

May these pages remind you that you are worthy of
both love and self-respect, and that there are always new
beginnings, waiting just beyond the silence.

May you find your Aubery.

Acknowledgements

This book would not exist without the steady presence and unwavering faith of those who walked with me through its creation.

To my family, your encouragement and belief shaped every word. Thank you for holding me up when writing felt impossible and for reminding me that my voice matters.

To Aubery, passionate mentor, my Love and my only friend who listened to tangled drafts and endless doubts, whose presence, patience, and love have shaped not only the story within these pages but also who I am as a person.

Your support and insights during the writing process gave me the courage to be honest and open. This book is as much yours as it is mine.

Deepest thanks also to my publishers and editorial team—your professionalism, expertise, and trust gave this story wings.

A special note of gratitude goes to those who inspired the hearts of Lisa and Aubery—not only in fiction but in the quiet corners of real life.

And to all who have known struggle, felt unseen, or longed for a gentle hand in the dark: it is your courage that this book seeks to honour most of all.

Thank you all for walking this path beside me. This book stands as a tribute to your impact and the power of shared dreams

Foreword

If I were to begin with the truth, it is that Lisa was never a simple chapter in my life—she was the very axis around which the meaning of love, trust, and forgiveness spun anew.

When I first stepped into the world that would become our story, I was burdened by history—cautious, wary, practiced at holding myself apart for fear of loss. I thought I knew what connection meant. I thought I understood my own capacity for care, for patience, even for pain. But love, as Lisa taught me, is not the absence of doubt or fear—it is about choosing someone again and again, even in the fragile space between hope and heartbreak.

There were moments, more than I wish to count, when my own flaws and mistakes cast long shadows across the joy we built. Some wounds in this book are mine; some are both of ours. I trace, in these pages, the days when I wasn't enough—when I let words go unsent, when pride and silence held me hostage, and when my choices risked the very trust that Lisa so bravely gave.

To witness Lisa's journey—her resilience, depth, and fierce determination—not only changed me; it redefined

what it means to be held and seen by another person. Her honesty pulled me beyond my armour. Her pain, mirrored in my own, formed the bridge we crossed together, sometimes stumbling, sometimes running, always choosing to return.

This book is not a fairytale. The love here is messy, uncertain, relentless in its willingness to rise from injury and misunderstanding. We did not always get it right. But Lisa never withheld forgiveness when she found vulnerability in me, and even at my lowest, I could not let go of the hope she placed in my hands.

To anyone reading these pages, I offer this: love may not erase the scars left by fear, betrayal, or the missteps we are all bound to make. Yet if you are lucky enough to find someone willing to fight for truth, to be imperfect and present and brave with you, then cherish them. Let the world say what it will—choose each other anyway.

Lisa, your courage is the heart of this story. For all who have doubted themselves, their worth, or their strength—I hope these words remind you that it is never wrong to be the hero of your own life.

With gratitude and awe,

Aubery

Preface

Writing *My Last Love: Beyond the Interview* has been a deeply personal and transformative journey. What began as a reflection on my own life gradually evolved into the story of Lisa and Aubery—a fictional retelling shaped by my experiences, dreams, and emotional truths. Many moments in this book are inspired by real events, while the characters and settings have been crafted with creative liberty to both protect privacy and illuminate the deeper emotions I have lived.

Lisa's fears, hopes, and choices mirror many of my own. The battles with doubt, healing after heartbreak, the sting of misunderstanding, and the enduring search for trust and connection are not just narrative devices—they are fragments of my story, retold with small changes to honour both reality and imagination. Through these pages, I sought not only to recount what happened to me, but to explore the universal courage it takes to love bravely, to forgive, and to embrace vulnerability in a world that doesn't always make it easy.

My hope is that you will find pieces of your own journey reflected here, and that Lisa and Aubery's story will resonate as both a tribute and a companion to any

reader who has loved, struggled, and searched for meaning in the chaos of real life. This book is more than fiction; it is a testament to the healing that comes from honesty and the transformative power of storytelling itself.

Prologue

Lisa was never meant to be an ordinary chapter in anyone's life. She carried within her the fierce strength of battles fought in silence, the tenderness born from scars invisible to the world. When Aubery first saw her, he recognized not a story ready to be written—but a living testament to resilience, trust, and fragile hope.

Their world was not one of fairy tales or easy love. It was a realm filled with quiet fears and whispered doubts, where trust was forged in the heat of misunderstanding, and forgiveness blossomed amid the rubble of broken promises. Between them lay shadows cast by past hurts and moments when silence spoke louder than words.

Yet in those fragile spaces, something unexpected took root—something relentless and beautiful: love, imperfect and unyielding. The kind of love that demands courage to stay when leaving seems easier, that chooses a trembling “yes” in the face of uncertainty.

This is a story of two souls weaving a fragile tapestry of connection—of being seen, of letting go, and the choice to come back again. It is a journey through the storms of jealousy, the quiet ache of loneliness, the battles waged within and between. Above all, it is a

testament to the unbreakable bond that grows when two hearts refuse to surrender.

Aubery learned what it meant to trust beyond fear; Lisa discovered that vulnerability could be strength. Together, they faced a world eager to tear them apart and chose to fight—to hold on to the imperfect joy found only when two people dare to love without guarantees.

This is their beginning—a prologue to lives forever changed by love's complicated grace.

MY LAST LOVE: *Beyond the Interview*

Lisa's fingers flew across the keyboard as she sent out a flurry of texts to the candidates waiting for their interviews. Mrs. Kaira's gentle prodding had turned into a persistent reminder: ensure every candidate joined the online meeting without fail.

As Mrs. Kaira's secretary, Lisa was determined to get everything just right.

The interview panel, comprising Mrs. Kaira, the Director; Stella, the Head of HR; Mr. Jackson, the Deputy Director; and Mr. Amar, the Incharge, were seated in a conference room, their faces stern and expectant.

Lisa sitting at the end of the table, her eyes darting between the candidates' screens and the panellist's notes.

Most of the candidates were sailing through the interviews with ease, but a few had failed to show up, and she had been diligently noting down the panellist's comments and the candidates' responses.

Her life was just as is until she sent a text to one of the tardy candidates:

"Are you online? Join ASAP, they're waiting for you..."

Just then, a message popped up on her phone. It was from Aubery:

"Joined. Thanks."

Her eyes widened in surprise as she glanced up to see Aubery, the candidate for the Junior Scientist post, answering the panellist's questions with confidence.

As she watched him, a mix of confusion and amusement washed over her.

"Wait a minute... wasn't I just texting him?"

"How come he's...?"

Her mind whirled with questions, but she pushed them aside, focusing on the interview at hand.

She had wrapped up the interviews and sent out offer letters to the selected candidates, hoping Aubery

would soon join their team. However, when the second round of interviews concluded without a hitch, she still hadn't received a response from Aubery.

Assuming he wouldn't be joining, she approached Mrs. Kaira to update her on the situation.

Mrs. Kaira advised her to reach out to Aubery via call or WhatsApp. She promptly dialled Aubery's number.

"Hey Aubery! Hope you're doing well," Lisa said, with a friendly voice."

"We haven't heard from you about your joining. Will you be joining our group?"

Aubery's voice was apologetic on the other end.

"Hello Lisa, I wasn't able to reply to your email due to a technical glitch with my mail."

"I'll be joining soon, but I need to request a slight extension on my joining date."

Her curiosity was piqued. "What's the issue?"

"I'm not yet relieved from my current job, and the transport arrangements you've mentioned won't be feasible for me from here," Aubery explained.

"Could I possibly get about 10 more days?"

Lisa approached Mrs. Kaira about Aubery's request for an extension, and Mrs. Kaira agreed to accommodate

him with a condition: if Aubery failed to join by the new date, there would be no further extensions, and they would proceed with another candidate.

She conveyed the message to Aubery, who assured her that he would join as planned.

However, she couldn't shake off the doubt lingering in her mind.

"Would Aubery really commit to joining our team, or was he waiting for another opportunity?" Lisa decided to reach out to him directly.

"Hey Aubery! How are you doing? This is Lisa from the research institute," she texted.

"Can we trust that you'll join us as promised, or are there other factors at play?"

She waited anxiously for Aubery's response, but the silence stretched on. she saw the blue ticks, indicating he'd read my message, and her excitement turned to frustration.

"Why did I do that?" she wondered, hitting her forehead in exasperation.

Maybe I shouldn't have reached out so personally. Shaking off the thought, she refocused on her work.

As the day drew to a close, her phone buzzed with a message from Aubery.

Her heart skipped a beat as she opened the text.

“Hi Lisa, sorry for the delayed response.”

“I was caught up with work. I’ll be joining your organization. No other plans.” A wave of relief washed over her.

Yet, as she reflected on her actions, she couldn’t help but wonder why she’d invested so much emotional energy into this conversation.

“Why bother so much?” she muttered to herself, shaking her head.

With a shrug, she packed up and headed home, leaving the thoughts behind.

The next day, she was busy with work and assisting Mrs. Kaira, but her mind kept wandering back to Aubery.

After work, few colleagues invited her to a party, and she decided to join to unwind. With a few drinks under her belt, she inexplicably dialled Aubery’s number. Before she could even process what she was doing, the call went unanswered.

Disappointed, she had a few more drinks. Later, her phone rang – Aubery was calling back. she excused herself from the party and answered the call.

“Hello?” she said, her voice a bit tipsy.

“Hey, you called?” Aubery’s voice was calm and collected.

Her words tumbled out: “Oh, yeah! I just wanted to confirm if you’re joining us or not.”

Aubery’s tone turned amused: “You’re drinking?”

She giggled. “Yeah, just a few drinks with colleagues.”

There was a brief silence before Aubery spoke up, his voice surprisingly concerned:

“You shouldn’t be drinking, it’s not good for your health. Is drinking allowed at your place?”

Lisa’s heart skipped a beat; Aubery’s words felt almost... intimate.

She shook off the feeling, attributing it to the drinks.

“It’s just a few drinks, I’ll be fine by the time I reach home.”

Her tone turned professional: “When are you coming to join?”

“I’m already in Melbourne,” Aubery replied.

“I’ll come to join tomorrow.”

The next day, Lisa got ready for work without realizing she was dressing up to meet Aubery. She tied her mid-length wavy chocolate brown hair into a half-ponytail and applied a nude matte lipstick. Her outfit consisted of a black pant, maroon shirt, and black heels.

As she checked herself in the mirror, she smiled, feeling confident.

“Wow, amazing! Time to get to work.”

Lisa is still waiting for Aubery to arrive, while Mrs. Kaira is already in her cabin. With a heavy workload, Lisa wondered when Aubery would show up.

“Should I text him to confirm?”

Just then, her phone rang – it was Aubery.

“Hi, I’m in the institute. Which way should I come?”

Lisa directed him to Block B, 3rd floor.

“You can reach in a few minutes.”

As she waited, a colleague named Simon approached her. “What are you waiting for?”

Lisa replied, “A new joiner is coming, and I have a lot of work to do after he joins.”

She tried to sound casual, but her anticipation was palpable.

As Lisa waited, Simon called out to her from behind.

“Someone’s waiting for you outside.”

She was about to sigh in frustration when she stopped short—a young man was waiting by the entrance.

The fluorescent light played over his features, catching the warmth in his radiant brown eyes as he looked up and met her gaze. In that silent moment, the world seemed to pause.

Aubery, with his warm smile and thoughtful demeanour, looked even more attractive than she had imagined. His eyes seemed to dominate his face, radiating kindness and warmth.

As she approached him, Aubery extended his hand for a handshake.

“I’m Aubery,” he said with a smile.

Lisa’s heart skipped a beat as she took his hand, feeling a spark of connection. His handshake was firm, soft, and warm, leaving her with a sense of calm.

“Hi, I’m Lisa,” she replied, trying to compose herself.

“How was your journey?”

Aubery’s response was polite and courteous. “All good, Ms. Lisa.”

Lisa led him to a seat and began preparing the joining papers. As she disappeared from his sight, Aubery couldn’t help but gaze after her.

Meanwhile, Lisa’s mind was racing with thoughts about Aubery’s charming smile and captivating eyes.

She tried to focus on the task at hand, assisting Aubery with the paperwork and introducing him to Mrs. Kaira, who briefed him on the work culture.

After completing the formalities with HR, Lisa introduced Aubery to his team members, who welcomed him warmly. She then took him through the office policies, explaining the lunch timings, coffee breaks, and leave policies in detail.

As they wrapped up, Lisa mentioned, “You can head to your workstation now.”

But she hesitated, wanting to prolong their conversation. She searched for a reason to keep talking to him, unsure of how to let him go just yet.

As the time passing, Aubery called Lisa during his break, his voice casual and inviting.

“Hey, if you’re free, can we grab a coffee?”

Lisa hesitated, not being a coffee or tea fan. She replied politely, “I’d love to keep you company, but I don’t drink coffee or tea.”

There was a brief silence before Aubery suggested, “You can get something you like, and I’ll have coffee. No pressure.”

Lisa’s heart skipped a beat at his thoughtful response.

At the cafeteria, Aubery ordered a coffee for himself and, surprisingly, a strawberry-flavoured juice for Lisa – her favourite flavour, unbeknownst to him.

As they sipped their drinks, they chatted about work culture and Lisa's experience at the company.

The conversation took a turn when Aubery mentioned her drinking the previous night.

She felt a bit embarrassed, explaining,

"I just had one drink, and they kept pushing me to have more."

Aubery's curiosity got the better of him. "Were there boys around?"

"Yes, there were boys and girls, but more boys."

Aubery's concern was palpable. "How did you get home? Did someone drop you off or...?"

She reassured him, "One of my female colleagues left with me, and my best friend came to pick me up. I stayed at her place until I sobered up."

Aubery's expression softened. "I'm just concerned about safety these days. But I'm glad you had someone looking out for you."

Lisa appreciated his genuine concern, feeling a connection growing between them.

After coffee break, the both returned to their work stations. Soon after she left Aubery appeared right Infront of her for his access in the institute and ID.

As Aubery returned to Lisa's office, the soft glow of the fluorescent lights above seemed to highlight the gentle smile on her face as she assisted him with his ID and access.

Despite being the Director's secretary, isn't it strange for her to assist Aubery?

She laughed at herself by thinking this and for god's sake even Mrs. Kaira is not against Lisa assisting Aubery.

Lisa's kindness and willingness to help shone through in her every gesture, from the way she patiently explained the procedures to the gentle touch of her fingers as she handed him the ID card.

By thinking all these Lisa is getting a smile on her face which is noticed by Aubery.

"You're cute"- Aubery said, his voice low and smooth, like honey dripping from a spoon.

The air was filled with an almost tangible chemistry as Aubery complimented Lisa's smile.

"Huh"?? Lisa's cheeks flushed a soft pink, and she looked taken aback, her eyes widening slightly as she processed his words.

“You’re having such a cute smile,” Aubery repeated, his eyes locked onto hers, the intensity of his gaze making her heart skip a beat.

Lisa was stunned, her mind racing to find the right words to respond. But before she could utter a single syllable, her face betrayed her, and a smile spread across her lips, this time coming from the depths of her heart.

As she stood there, frozen in the moment, Lisa couldn’t help but wonder if the flutter in her chest or stomach or entire body was indeed the butterflies, she had heard so much about.

“Yes, it’s true” that I’m getting butterflies.

Was it possible that she is actually feeling butterflies because of Aubery’s words?

The thought sent a shiver down her spine, and she felt her smile grow wider, more genuine.

With a hint of shyness,

Lisa replied, “Thank you”, her voice was barely above a whisper, but the words hung in the air like a promise, a gentle whisper of the connection that was blossoming between them.

Her gaze drifted to Aubery’s eyes, and she found herself lost in their depths. “Your eyes are... really captivating,” she murmured, the words slipping out

unbidden, as if her thoughts had somehow found a voice.

She didn't even realize she'd said it out loud until she saw Aubery's smile grow wider, his eyes crinkling at the corners.

The silence between them was palpable, a heavy blanket that wrapped around the room, suffocating all sound. Lisa's mind whirled with thoughts; her lips pursed in contemplation.

She didn't know what to say next, her usual confidence deserting her. The only sound was the soft hum of the computer and the gentle rustle of papers on her desk.

Finally, she broke the silence, her voice barely above a whisper.

"Can we meet after working hours?" Aubery's eyes locked onto hers, his expression unreadable for a moment before he nodded, a small smile playing on his lips.

"Sure, will do that."

As she settled back into her chair, her mind refused to cooperate, wandering back to the moment Aubery had complimented her smile.

The memory sent a flutter through her chest, making it hard to focus on the tasks at hand.

The words on her screen blurred together, and the hum of the office equipment faded into the background as her thoughts drifted to the evening ahead. With each passing minute, her anticipation grew, until the clock finally ticked its way to the end of the workday.

As the evening drew in, a familiar hesitation crept in, and she found herself torn between caution and curiosity. Her fingers hovered over the phone, and for a moment, it seemed as though time itself had paused. Then, with a deep breath, she made the call. In one ring only, he answered, his voice low and playful.

“Yes, ma’am, how can I help you?”

The words brought a smile to her lips, and she felt her doubts melt away.

“Will meet outside the campus?” she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

“OK, ma’am, I’m outside your cabin. If you come out, we’ll go together,” he replied, his voice filled with anticipation.

As she stepped out of her cabin, she saw him standing outside, leaning against the wall with a relaxed posture.

They walked together; the evening air filled with the sweet scent of blooming flowers. They decided to grab some snacks from a nearby stall and sat down on a bench, enjoying the quiet evening.

The conversation flowed effortlessly between them, like they had known each other for years. They talked about everything and nothing, their words dancing in the air like butterflies. The snacks were delicious, but the company was even better.

As the evening wore on, the stars began to twinkle in the sky, and the world around them melted away, leaving only the two of them, lost in their own little bubble of happiness.

They laughed and smiled, their eyes locking in a way that made their hearts skip a beat. The air was filled with an unspoken tension, a sense of possibility that hung like a promise.

As the night wore on, Aubery glanced at his watch, and a hint of disappointment crossed his face.

“I think it’s getting late,” he said, his voice reluctant.

Lisa nodded, feeling a pang of sadness. They stood up, and Aubery walked her to the parking lot, the silence between them comfortable and familiar.

As they stood near their vehicles, Aubery turned to her, his eyes searching hers.

“Would you like to meet again tomorrow?” he asked, his voice low and hopeful.

Lisa’s heart skipped a beat as she smiled and nodded.

“I’d love to,” she said, her voice barely above a whisper.

Aubery’s face lit up with a smile, “I’ll meet you at 9,” he whispered, his breath sending shivers down her spine.

Lisa watched as he walked away, while her thoughts revolving around him a bit playful wild as if she leaned in, her hands tangled around his neck and his lips brushed against her cheek – “stop it, we just met for a conversation” muttered to herself shaking her head.

She’s feeling like floating on air. The night had been magical, and she knew that this was just the beginning of something special.

As the days went by, Lisa and Aubery’s connection grew stronger, their bond deepening with each passing moment.

They would meet every morning and evening, their conversations flowing effortlessly, like a gentle stream that had found its way through the rocks.

But when they were around others, they would maintain a distance, a careful facade that hid the true nature of their relationship.

Lisa had started to mingle with Aubery’s teammates, joining them for breaks and laughing at their jokes.

Aubery would watch her with a smile, his eyes crinkling at the corners as he observed her ease with his colleagues.

But beneath the surface, both of them were harbouring questions, doubts that lingered in the shadows of their minds.

One day, as they walked to her home, Aubery turned to her with a playful glint in his eye.

“If you get any closer to me, your boyfriend’s going to get mad at you,” he teased, his voice low and husky.

Lisa’s heart skipped a beat as she met his gaze, her mind racing with the implications of his words.

She raised an eyebrow, a smile playing on her lips. “Oh, and what makes you think I have a boyfriend?” she asked, her voice light and airy.

Aubery’s grin faltered for a moment, and he looked at her with a curious expression.

“Don’t you?” he asked, his voice tinged with surprise.

Lisa’s smile grew wider as she shook her head. “No, I don’t,” she said, her voice barely above a whisper.

Aubery’s face lit up with a smile, and he leaned in, his voice dropping to a whisper.

“Good,” he said, his breath sending shivers down her spine and he continued to say I don’t care about your past.

Lisa’s heart was racing now, her pulse pounding in her ears. She knew that this was a moment of truth, a moment that would change the course of their relationship forever.

As they stood there, locked in a gaze that seemed to stretch on forever, Lisa knew that she had to ask him the question that had been burning in her mind.

“Aubery,” she said, her voice soft and tentative. “Can I ask you something?”

Aubery’s eyes never left hers as he nodded, his face serious. “Of course, what is it?” he asked, his voice low and gentle.

Lisa took a deep breath, her heart pounding in her chest. “What do you think of me?” she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

Aubery’s face softened, and he reached out, his hand brushing against hers. “You’re incredible,” he said, his voice filled with admiration.

“The way you light up a room with your presence, the way your smile can brighten up even the darkest of days, it’s captivating. You’re a woman of substance, with a heart full of kindness and a spirit that’s both fierce and gentle.”

“I feel the same way about you,” she said, her voice trembling.

Aubery’s face lit up with a smile, and he leaned in, his lips brushing against hers in a gentle kiss. She leaned into him, her laughter fading into a quiet hush as his fingers traced the curve of her jaw.

Streetlights painted soft halos across the quiet lot. Aubery paused, searching her eyes as if looking for something unspoken.

They didn’t need words; the truth was in the hush that settled around them. Standing close, so close she could hear the steady rhythm of his heartbeat, Lisa felt a quiet promise in the warmth of his presence. When his hand found her waist, it rested there gently, not urgent but certain—memorizing this moment, this new nearness.

When she looked up, her eyes reflected both joy and vulnerability, as though she had handed him the last secret she carried.

He smiled, and in that expression, she read everything she needed, lost in the moment, Lisa knew that she had found something special, something that would change her life forever.

As the days went by, Lisa and Aubery’s relationship continued to blossom. But despite their growing

closeness, Lisa's mind was filled with doubts and insecurities. She knew she had to open up to Aubery about her feelings, but she was hesitant, unsure if their relationship was ready for such vulnerability.

"Should I tell him?" she wondered.

"Is it too soon?" Her mind whispered back,

"You've been in a relationship before, maybe this isn't love at first sight after all." The questions swirled in her head, making it hard for her to focus on Aubery.

As a result, Lisa's attention towards Aubery began to wane, and he couldn't help but notice. He started to wonder if she was just like the other girls he had met, only looking for a good time.

"Is she just playing me?" he thought, feeling a pang of uncertainty.

But then he tried to put himself in her shoes, thinking maybe she was feeling overwhelmed by the rapid pace of their relationship.

"Perhaps she's just shy or feeling guilty about how quickly things are moving," he rationalized. Deciding to clear up the misunderstanding, Aubery headed to Lisa's cabin, but what he saw took him aback.

Lisa was engrossed in a conversation with another man, laughing and smiling with an ease that Aubery

hadn't seen in days. A pang of jealousy shot through him, and he felt a knot form in his stomach.

"So, she's moved on already," he thought, his mind racing with doubts.

Without making his presence known, Aubery turned around and walked away, his heart heavy with uncertainty.

Little did he know, the conversation Lisa was having with the other man was completely innocent, and he was about to jump to conclusions that would change everything.

As Lisa approached Aubery, she noticed a chill in his gaze that sent a shiver down her spine. His eyes, once warm and inviting, now seemed cold and distant, like a winter breeze that had swept away the warmth of their connection.

He didn't smile, didn't even acknowledge her presence, and instead turned around and walked away with his teammates, leaving her standing alone in the middle of the hallway.

The rejection stung in the heart, and Lisa felt tears pricking at the corners of her eyes like a thousand needles. She couldn't understand why Aubery was behaving this way, and her mind began to fill with doubts and fears.

“He’s just a playboy,” she thought, feeling a pang of sadness that threatened to overwhelm her. “He played me, and now he’s done with me.”

Lisa questioned her own judgment, wondering how she had misread Aubery so badly.

“Why did I give him so much attention?” she thought, feeling regret and frustration wash over her like a wave. She decided to distance herself from him, to protect her own heart from further pain.

But an hour later, reality dawned on her like a slow-rising sun. She realized that she hadn’t responded to Aubery’s messages for three days, and that he might be misunderstanding her intentions.

She also discovered that Aubery had come to her cabin, only to see her talking to a doctor who had approached her for advice on a project.

The doctor, a soft-spoken man, had been discussing some academic matters with Lisa, and Aubery had mistakenly perceived him as someone close to her.

Lisa felt a wave of relief wash over her, followed by regret and guilt that threatened to consume her. She had jumped to conclusions, just like Aubery had.

Now, she wondered if she had overreacted, if she had misjudged Aubery’s intentions. The thought of clearing up the misunderstanding and talking to him about her insecurities seemed more pressing than ever.

But would he even want to talk to her now?

The uncertainty hung in the air like a challenge, and Lisa knew she had to take the first step to bridge the gap between them.

As she stood outside his cabin, Lisa's heart pounded in her chest like a drumbeat in a tribal ritual. She had tried calling Aubery multiple times, but he hadn't answered. Desperate to clear the air, she decided to find him in person.

She scoured the campus, checking all the places he might be at that time – the library, the café, the park. Finally, she spotted him in the middle of the hallway, his broad shoulders and familiar stride making her heart skip a beat.

But as soon as he saw her, Aubery's expression turned cold, and he changed direction, walking away from her. Lisa's instincts kicked in, and she ran after him, her heels clicking on the floor. She caught up to him and grasped his wrist, her touch sending a spark of electricity through both of them.

"Did you just play with me?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper, but laced with accusation and vulnerability.

The question seemed to hang in the air like a challenge, and Aubery's eyes flashed with anger as he turned back to her.

“What right do you have to question me like this?” he demanded aggressively, his voice low and intense, like a knife cutting through the tension between them.

The words cut deep, and Lisa felt like she was drowning in a sea of uncertainty, someone is pressing her neck and digging her heart out. Tears pricked at the corners of her eyes as she tried to explain herself.

“How could you do this to me?” she thought, her mind racing with questions.

“Was it all just a game to you? Did you ever care about me, or was I just a passing fancy?” The doubts swirled in her head, making her feel dizzy and disoriented.

“You haven’t contacted me, and how do I know whether to ask you if you were serious about me or just trying to spend a night with me?” she asked, her voice trembling like a leaf in the wind.

“You just left after that day without saying a word, which left me with doubts... I wasn’t sure, so I didn’t reach out to you. And then work held me up.”

As she spoke, her emotions poured out like a pent-up storm.

“What was I supposed to think?” she wondered.

“That you had lost interest? That you were just using me for your own amusement?” The thought made her feel sick to her stomach.

“My colleagues and others who knew me before they all are asking me if I’m dating you?” she continued, her voice cracking with desperation.

“Or I’m just hovering around you as you’re new? What should I reply to them? Tell me!” she pleaded, her eyes welling up with tears.

“Do I tell them the truth?” she thought.

“That I’m confused and hurt and don’t know what’s going on?” The uncertainty was suffocating, and all she could do was wait for his answer.

Aubery’s gaze locked onto hers, and for a moment, they just stared at each other, the tension between them palpable like a living, breathing entity. Lisa’s heart pounded in her chest, waiting for his response, her future hanging in the balance.

Would he tell her the truth, or would he leave her hanging in the dark?

The uncertainty was excruciating, and all she could do was wait.

Then, Aubery’s eyes seemed to search for something in hers, and he asked softly, “What do you want to tell them?”

The question caught Lisa off guard, and she hesitated, unsure of how to respond. She murmured, her voice barely audible, “Don’t you want to tell them that we’re together?”

Aubery’s reaction was unreadable, his expression a mask of calmness. He replied, his voice intense yet gentle, “I don’t want unnecessary attention and the evil eyes on us.”

The words sent a shiver down Lisa’s spine, and she felt a flutter in her chest. She wasn’t sure what to make of his response, but she sensed a depth to his words that she couldn’t quite grasp.

Lisa’s mind began to wander, wondering what he meant by “evil eyes.”

Was he worried about gossip or something more? She looked into his eyes, searching for answers, but they seemed to hold a thousand secrets.

As she pondered his words, she felt a sense of unease creeping in. Was he trying to protect her or himself?

But before she could process his response, Lisa felt the need to clear up the misunderstanding about the lecturer.

“Aubery, I want to explain something,” she said, her voice sincere.

“The man I was talking to earlier is a junior doctor. He has a project to complete and came to me about Mrs. Kaira’s appointment. He’s really struggling to meet the deadline, and I was just trying to help him.”

Aubery’s expression shifted, and his voice turned playful.

“Oh, so you’re laughing in front of him, listening to his nonsense jokes?” he teased, a hint of amusement dancing in his eyes.

Lisa felt a surge of defensiveness, but she knew Aubery was just joking.

“Actually, it’s not like that,” she said, smiling.

“He’s not joking with me. He’s really worried about getting scolded by Mrs. Kaira because he didn’t complete his project on time.”

She chuckled, remembering the doctor’s nervous demeanour.

“He’s really afraid of her.”

Aubery’s eyes crinkled at the corners as he listened to her explanation and asked what’s his name? and for a moment, Lisa thought she saw a glimmer of understanding.

But she wasn’t sure what he was thinking, and the uncertainty lingered in the air between them. She replied his name is Alex.

As they stood there, the tension between them began to dissipate, replaced by a sense of curiosity. Lisa wondered what Aubery was thinking, what was going on behind those piercing eyes. She took a step closer to him, her heart pounding in her chest.

“Aubery, can I ask you something?” she said, her voice barely above a whisper.

Aubery’s gaze locked onto hers, and he nodded, his expression softening.

“Of course, what is it?” he asked, his voice low and gentle.

Lisa’s heart skipped a beat as she looked into his eyes, searching for answers to the questions that plagued her mind.

In that moment, Lisa felt a deep connection to Aubery, a sense of understanding that went beyond words. She knew that she had to trust him, to believe in him, and to take a chance on their relationship.

As she looked into his eyes, she saw a glimmer of hope, a sense of possibility that made her heart sing.

After a brief silence, Lisa’s mind racing with doubts and fears, she decided to take a chance and ask Aubery the question that had been haunting her.

“Do you really like me?” she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

Aubery's response was immediate, his voice filled with determination.

"Yes, I like you," he said, "but I don't know much about you and your past."

Lisa felt a pang of realization, knowing that she had been holding back, unsure of how to reveal her true self.

As she looked into his eyes, she knew that it was time to be honest, to open up and share her story. She couldn't keep her past hidden forever, not if she wanted this relationship to work.

It had been three months since they met, and their connection had grown stronger with each passing day.

But despite the strong bond they shared, Lisa couldn't shake off the feeling that there was more to their relationship than met the eye.

Sometimes it felt like love, other times like friendship. She was getting mixed feelings about this relationship, and she knew she needed to be clear about her intentions.

When the right time comes, she thought of telling him about her past and the insecurities that had been plaguing her.

But before she could reveal herself, Aubery's sudden trip to Sydney with his friend caught her off guard.

He had messaged her casually, mentioning that he was leaving with his friend to meet another friend, but the lack of prior notice and the sudden distance between them left her feeling uncertain.

As the days went by, Aubery's responses became less frequent, and Lisa's doubts grew.

She couldn't shake off the feeling that he was hiding something from her, that there was someone else in his life more important than her.

Finally, she couldn't help but ask, "Are there any girls?"

Her heart sank as she waited for his response.

Aubery's reply was immediate, but it only added to her confusion.

"Only one girl, a bestie to my best friend and my mutual friend," he said, sending a video of them together, walking hand in hand.

Lisa's heart sank, and she felt like she was drowning in a sea of uncertainty. She couldn't bear the thought of Aubery having someone else in his life, someone he cared about more than her.

She jumped to the conclusion that the girl was his girlfriend, and that's why he had left without informing her about the trip.

Instead of fighting back or questioning him further, Lisa calmed herself and decided not to ask him anything until he came back.

She didn't want to confront him, not now, not when she was feeling so vulnerable.

She just wanted to disappear from his life, to erase the memories they had shared, and to move on.

As she sat there, her heart heavy with sorrow, Lisa wondered if she had been blind to the signs.

Had she been so caught up in her feelings for Aubery that she had ignored the warning signs?

She couldn't help but think about the past, about the insecurities that had plagued her for so long.

And now, it seemed like history was repeating itself. Aubery had someone else in his life, someone he cared about deeply.

Lisa felt like she was losing him, like she was slipping away from his life.

As she waited for him to return, Lisa couldn't help but wonder what the future held for them.

Would Aubery come back to her, or would he choose to stay with the girl he had been holding hands with?

Only time would tell, but for now, Lisa could only wait and hope that things would work out in her favour.

She never prayed to god this serious about anyone but she prayed for this relationship to grow stronger and to be together forever.

As the last day in Sydney unfolded, Aubery called Lisa with a thoughtful gesture.

“Hey, I’m going shopping with my friends. Do you want me to pick up anything for you?”

“A handbag, dresses, or some jewellery?”

His voice was cheerful, and for a moment, Lisa’s heart skipped a beat. She was touched by his consideration.

At first, she was happy and mentioned a few things she had been eyeing. But as she thought about it more, she realized she didn’t want to accept gifts from him, not when she was feeling so uncertain about their relationship.

“Actually, I don’t need anything right now,” she said, trying to sound casual.

“If I need something, I’ll ask you in the future.”

Aubery didn’t push the issue, and Lisa was grateful for that. A day later, he returned, and she went to pick him up.

As they navigated the roads together, Lisa noticed that Aubery wasn’t very patient with her. He didn’t

explain the routes or signages clearly, and she had to figure things out on her own.

Despite his lack of guidance, Lisa tried to manage and follow his directions. When they finally arrived at his home, she dropped him off without saying much.

“I’ll see you later,” she said, trying to sound normal. And with that, she left quietly, her mind already racing with thoughts of the girl Aubery had been holding hands with.

As she drove back home, Lisa’s thoughts swirled around the image of Aubery and the girl, laughing and shopping together.

She tried to shake off the feeling of unease, telling herself she was being paranoid. But the ache in her heart persisted, a dull pain that she couldn’t ignore.

She focused on the road ahead, determined to get home safely. But as she drove, and the ache in her heart lingered, she couldn’t help but wonder what the future held for them.

Would Aubery’s affection for her be enough to overcome the doubts that had crept into her mind?

Only time would tell. She left out a sigh.

The next day at the institute, Aubery was engrossed in his work, barely acknowledging Lisa’s presence. She

tried to brush it off, but the silence between them felt oppressive.

Her mind began to wander, and she couldn't help but wonder if he had lost interest in her.

As she watched him work, Lisa's thoughts swirled with questions.

Should she confront him about the girl and the trip to Sydney, or should she pretend like nothing was wrong?

The uncertainty was eating away at her, and she couldn't shake off the feeling that something was amiss.

Determined to get some answers, Lisa tried calling Aubery, but his phone was busy. She could hear him talking to someone, and the sound of his voice made her feel lost and uncertain.

A mix of emotions swirled inside her – anger, sadness, and frustration.

With a newfound determination, Lisa decided to confront Aubery directly.

She walked up to him, her heart pounding in her chest, and asked point-blank, "Who's that girl?"

"Why did you go on a sudden trip to meet her? And who is she to you?"

Aubery looked at her with confusion, clearly taken aback by her questions.

“What are you talking about?” he asked, his brow furrowed in concern.

Lisa pulled out her phone and showed him the video he had sent her, the one of him and the girl walking hand in hand. Aubery’s expression changed, and he seemed to understand what she was referring to.

“Oh, you’re talking about Susan,” he said calmly, his voice gentle and relaxed.

“She’s a mutual friend, someone I know through my best friend. We hung out in Sydney, but there’s nothing romantic between us.”

Lisa’s eyes narrowed, and she didn’t like the calm tone of his voice. It seemed too casual, too nonchalant.

She wasn’t sure if she believed him, and the uncertainty lingered in her mind.

“Susan,” she repeated, the name sounding foreign on her lips. Lisa is not aware that she’s growing possessive about Aubery.

As she looked at Aubery, Lisa couldn’t help but wonder if she was overreacting.

Was she just being paranoid, or was there something more to the story?

She searched his eyes for answers, but all she saw was a calm, gentle gaze that seemed to be telling her the truth.

But it wasn't enough to calm her doubts as she's getting insecure about him. Yet she tried to believe in him.

As Aubery explained the sudden trip, Lisa's skepticism was palpable. She raised an eyebrow, her mind racing with doubts.

"It was planned with someone else, but they didn't show up, so my best friend Peter asked me to tag along," he said, his voice matter-of-fact.

But Lisa wasn't convinced. She folded her arms across her chest, her eyes narrowing slightly. "What about holding hands with Susan?" she pressed, her voice laced with doubt.

Aubery's tone turned impatient, intense. "It's just a friendly gesture," he repeated, his eyes flashing with defensiveness.

"I held her hand while walking through the mall because she was taking a video. What's wrong with that?"

Lisa felt a pang of frustration. She didn't believe him, not entirely. She hesitated, unsure of how to proceed.

She's usually very aggressive, impatient and dominant around others but around Aubery she's being calm.

She's trying to be an understanding girlfriend of his emotions or his actions.

Then, she asked the question that had been burning on her mind.

"Tell me the truth," she said, her voice firm. "Is she your friend or girlfriend?"

Aubery's expression softened slightly, and he replied,

"She's my mutual friend, that's it. Nothing is there in between us." His voice was calm, reassuring, but Lisa's doubts lingered.

She decided to trust him, but her insecurities poked her with doubts. She couldn't shake off the feeling that there was more to the story than Aubery was letting on. Despite her reservations, she chose not to dwell on it, telling herself to trust him.

In a bid to put her mind at ease, Lisa made a request.

"Don't talk to Susan again," she said, her voice firm.

"Block her on every platform you're connected with her."

Aubery's expression was hesitant, but he agreed.

"It won't be good cutting her off like this," he said, "The truth is, I'm not sure if I can just cut her off without any reason. But I won't talk to her. I assure you."

As Aubery spoke, his phone slipped from his hands, and when he reached for it, he realized that Lisa had taken it. She was scrolling through his messages, her eyes scanning the screen with a mix of shock and horror.

The messages were intimate, the emojis suggesting a closeness that made Lisa's heart break. She felt like she had been blind to the signs, and now she couldn't bear to look at Aubery. Without saying a word, she turned and left, leaving Aubery confused and concerned.

As she walked away, Lisa felt like her world was crumbling. She had trusted Aubery, and now she felt betrayed.

The messages on his phone had revealed a truth she didn't want to accept. She didn't know what to do next, but she knew she couldn't stay with him. Not now, not after what she had seen.

As Lisa walked away from Aubery's place, the weight of her discovery threatened to crush her.

The messages on his phone had revealed a truth she didn't want to accept - a romantic connection with Susan that seemed to contradict Aubery's words.

Tears streamed down her face, her heart heavy with sorrow and betrayal.

Lisa struggled to come to terms with what she had seen. Her thoughts went back to before meeting Aubery - She had removed all her social media accounts except

WhatsApp, but she had downloaded Instagram and Snapchat to connect with Aubery.

She kept her platforms private, using them mostly to reach out to him.

Now, she wondered if she had been foolish to trust him so blindly.

As she navigated the complex emotions swirling inside her, Lisa decided to take a step back and try to see things from Aubery's perspective.

Maybe Susan was his past, and there was a valid reason for him to meet her.

But the question that kept haunting her was: why did Aubery meet Susan if there's nothing between them?

Lisa's mind was a whirlwind of thoughts and emotions. She couldn't shake off the feeling that Aubery was hiding something from her.

She decided to get her man back, but this time, she would do things differently. If Aubery truly loved her, he wouldn't be offended by her actions.

With a newfound determination, Lisa decided to reach out to Susan directly. She typed out a message on her phone from Instagram, her heart racing with anticipation.

What would Susan's response reveal about her relationship with Aubery?

Would it confirm Lisa's suspicions or alleviate her doubts?

As she waited for Susan's reply, Lisa's emotions were in turmoil. She felt a mix of anxiety, anticipation, and fear.

What if Susan's response confirmed her worst fears?

What if Aubery was indeed in a relationship with Susan, and Lisa had been blind to the signs?

The minutes ticked by, and Lisa's phone remained silent. She checked her messages obsessively, her eyes glued to the screen.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, Susan's response arrived.

As Lisa read Susan's response, her heart sank like a stone in the depths of the ocean. The words seemed to leap off the screen, piercing her soul like a thousand daggers.

"Yes, Aubery and I were in a relationship, but suddenly he started avoiding me in the past 3 months. I don't know what happened."

"That's why I asked Aubery's friend Peter to help me meet Aubery. But after meeting me, he avoided talking with me. I think he's in love with someone else."

Lisa's eyes widened in shock, her mind reeling with the implications. She felt like she had been punched in the gut, her breath knocked out of her.

Her worst fears had been confirmed – Aubery had lied to her, and she had been blind to the signs. But as she read the message again, she noticed something that gave her pause.

Susan seemed genuine, her words laced with a tinge of sadness and confusion.

Lisa's curiosity got the better of her, and she decided to ask Susan about the video. "Why did you take that video with Aubery?" she typed, her fingers trembling slightly as she hit send.

Susan's response came quickly. "I forcibly took that video with him so that our friends wouldn't notice that we're not on good terms. I was trying to maintain the facade that we're still together."

Lisa's eyes narrowed, her mind racing with questions. Why was Susan trying to frame Aubery to his friends? What was she trying to achieve? But before she could ponder further, she decided to confront Susan strongly. "Aubery and I are together now, and I don't want you to get in touch with him," she typed, her fingers flying across the screen.

Susan's response was swift and venomous. "Do whatever you want, but that man is not a reliable person

to be in love with. He's not a good choice that I made. And for you Either"

Lisa's heart skipped a beat as she read the message. She felt a surge of anger and protectiveness towards Aubery. How dare Susan try to sabotage her relationship? She replied, her fingers flying across the screen. "Aubery is a reliable person, and I trust him the most, I know what type of man he is. Now that you've given advice to me, get away from his life and be in your limits. Don't try to contact Aubery ever again."

The conversation was escalating, the tension between them palpable. Susan seemed aggressive and determined to reach out to Aubery. That's when Aubery called Lisa, his voice low and questioning. "What are you doing with Susan? Why did you have to contact her?"

Lisa texted to Susan "I told you not to contact him ever again. He is beside me only, and his phone is with me." Susan was shocked, amused, and taken aback by this revelation and Lisa's assertiveness.

Lisa's heart was racing, her mind spinning with emotions. She didn't know how to respond to Aubery, but she knew she had to be honest. "I asked Susan to cut off contacts with you," she said, her voice firm.

There was a pause on the other end of the line, and for a moment, Lisa wondered if Aubery was still there. But then he spoke, his voice laced with amusement and

surprise. “You’re really something, Lisa. You’re not afraid to take on anyone, are you?”

Lisa’s heart skipped a beat as she heard the tone in Aubery’s voice. She wasn’t sure what it meant, but she knew one thing – she would fight for their relationship, no matter what.

The silence between them was oppressive, a heavy weight that hung in the air like a challenge. Aubery’s anger still simmered, his mind replaying the conversation between Lisa and Susan like a broken record. He couldn’t understand why Lisa had to go and contact Susan, why she couldn’t just leave things alone.

As the days passed, Aubery’s anger didn’t dissipate. Instead, it grew, fueled by his own insecurities and doubts. He had liked Lisa’s soft and peaceful nature, her willingness to listen and understand. But now, he saw a different side of her – assertive, confrontational, and determined. It was a side he didn’t like, a side that made him question whether he had misjudged her.

Aubery’s thoughts were a jumble of emotions, his mind racing with questions and doubts. He didn’t know how to process his feelings, didn’t know how to deal with the situation. All he knew was that he needed space, needed time to think and reflect.

Meanwhile, Lisa was lost in a sea of tears. She had no idea what she had done wrong, why Aubery had blocked her without explanation. She cried herself to

sleep, her heart heavy with sorrow and confusion. She was tired of playing games, tired of trying to understand Aubery's past. She wanted to confront him, to get to know him better, to discuss her own past relationships.

As the day turned into silence, Lisa's heart ached with longing. She missed Aubery, missed his presence in her life. But she refused to reach out, refused to apologize for something she didn't think was her fault. She would wait, she would observe, and she would plan her next move.

The silence between them was deafening, a chasm that seemed impossible to bridge. Lisa's mind was racing with questions. Would Aubery ever forgive her? Would he ever understand her perspective? Or would their relationship crumble under the weight of his anger and her determination?

As the hours ticked by, Lisa steeled herself for what was to come. She would not back down, not this time. She would fight for her relationship, but she would also fight for herself. The question was, would Aubery be willing to meet her halfway? Only time would tell.

Two days passed slowly, each one a reminder of the silence between them. Lisa's heart was heavy, her mind filled with doubts and fears. She refused to give up, but she's losing hope. She knew that their relationship was worth fighting for, and she is willing to do whatever it takes to make it work.

But as the silence stretched on, Lisa couldn't help but wonder – was it too late? Had Aubery's anger and hurt pride consumed him, or would he eventually come around? Only time would tell, and Lisa could only wait and hope that their love was strong enough to overcome the obstacles in their path.

Lisa's hope had dwindled to almost nothing, and she was now devastated that Aubery seemed to be gone for good. In a desperate attempt to make him realize how much pain she was suffering, she had starved herself, not eating for days. But little did she know, Aubery was going through a similar ordeal, his pride and ego preventing him from reaching out to her.

Determined to get answers and closure, Lisa decided to confront Aubery. She approached him in the laboratory, she didn't find him his place so she went to the hallway and tried to understand where he would be. She went to the laboratory where the cell culture will happen. He's sitting there staring blankly at the wall.

As Lisa approached Aubery in the laboratory, her heart was racing with a mix of emotions - anger, sadness, and desperation. She had been hurt by his actions, and she didn't know if she could forgive him. But she needed to know why he had blocked her, why he had suddenly decided to cut her off without any explanation.

Aubery sat staring blankly at the wall, his eyes unfocused and his expression unreadable. Lisa's voice cut through the silence, "Aubery?"

He turned his face to another side, avoiding eye contact with her. Lisa's heart ached as she saw the chill gaze in his eyes, a gaze that sent shivers down her spine.

"Why are you avoiding me?" she asked, her voice shaking slightly. "What have I done to make you like this?"

Aubery's eyes seemed to bore into her soul, his expression unyielding. "This won't work out," he said, his voice cold and detached.

"W-what??" Lisa confused and shocked.

"This relationship won't work out for both of us. You go your way, I'll go mine." He replied.

Lisa's heart sank as she heard his words. She felt like she had been punched in the gut, her breath knocked out of her. She couldn't believe that Aubery was giving up on their relationship so easily. She thought they had something special, something worth fighting for.

"Why are you thinking like this?" she asked, her voice cracking with emotion.

"Do you really want to leave me?"

Aubery's expression didn't change, but his voice was laced with vulnerability.

“I’m not good enough for you to rely on,” he said, his words cutting deep into Lisa’s heart.

Lisa started to cry out loud, her body shaking with sobs. She felt like she was losing the person she loved, the person who was supposed to be her rock, her support. Without thinking, she reached out to hug him, desperate for comfort and connection. At first, Aubery opposed her, his body stiff and unyielding. But eventually, he gave in, his arms wrapping around her tightly.

As they hugged, the pent-up anger, frustration, and emotions seemed to melt away, replaced by a sense of relief and comfort. They held each other tightly, their hands running through each other’s bodies, feeling their presence. Lisa felt like she was home, like she was exactly where she was meant to be.

After a few minutes of silence, Lisa pulled back and looked up at Aubery, her eyes red and puffy from crying.

“Will you be able to forget me?” she asked, her voice barely above a whisper. “How come you thought of leaving me? Am I nothing to you?”

The questions left Aubery speechless, his face a mask of emotions. Lisa read his expression and understood that he wasn’t okay with leaving her. He was vulnerable, and his words had been a facade to hide his true feelings. She saw the pain in his eyes, the uncertainty, and the fear.

After a brief silence, “Let’s go,” Lisa said, her voice soft and gentle. “We’ll have something to eat. I haven’t had anything in three days.” Aubery’s eyes locked onto hers, and for a moment, they just stared at each other, the connection between them palpable.

Lisa’s words seemed to break the spell, and Aubery nodded slowly. They walked out of the laboratory together, their arms around each other, their hearts still heavy with emotion.

But as they walked, Lisa felt a sense of hope, a sense that maybe, just maybe, they could work through their issues and come out stronger on the other side.

Lisa insisted they stop for something to eat first. The last few days had been draining, and she knew that hunger always sharpened silences and dulled tenderness. So, with small packets of snacks between them, they settled into the quiet, unwrapping and nibbling as though trying to replace lost strength—not just of the body, but of the heart.

It was Lisa who broke the rhythm. She always did. Words clung to her fingertips and tumbled out almost helplessly, while Aubery simply listened, silently carrying a weight no one else could see. Clearing her throat softly, she pushed a strand of hair behind her ear and said, “There’s something we need to decide, you and I... a few rules. Not because I don’t trust you, but because I can’t breathe without certain anchors.”

Aubery's gaze lifted to hers, steady, quiet, unreadable. He didn't protest. He never did.

"One," she began, her voice soft but firm, "we'll tell each other everything—even the things that sting, even if the words feel too heavy. Silence isn't protection—it's poison."

He only nodded, eyes fixed on her lips, catching each word as if it were a vow.

"Two," she continued, an almost childlike tremor laced in her tone, "not a single day apart without talking. Not one. Because when we do... it feels like breathing stops. My heart... it breaks." Her last word faltered, as if saying it made the pain real again.

Still, Aubery didn't speak. He gave her that patient, listening quiet, but in his chest, something tightened—shame for not knowing how to piece his own emotions into words the way she so effortlessly did.

"Three," she whispered, leaning closer across the small table between them, "never let anyone else step into this... what we have. No third person should be strong enough to bend us, to turn us against each other. The moment we give someone that power, we lose ourselves."

A breath caught in Aubery's chest. He could see the fear tucked beneath her insistence—the fear of losing

him, the fear of loneliness clawing its way back into her heart.

“And four,” she finished, her voice trembling now, “no lies. No hiding. No running away.”

Her eyes were wet, shimmering with both strength and fragility. A little too much for someone who gave too much of herself. But that was Lisa—overthinking things into galaxies, while Aubery stood on earth, quiet and grounded.

He reached forward, not with words—because words always deserted him at such moments—but with a slow nod that grew into the tiniest smile. His hand brushed against hers on the edge of the table, a silent agreement. A vow given not in speech, but in presence.

Three days. That’s how long they had been apart, shutting out each other’s voices, drifting in a silence that neither could bear. Three days had become three eternities. Now, reunited, their very souls felt parched—like two wanderers finally stumbling across the same wellspring.

When the others around finally left, their laughter and footsteps fading, the world shrank into quiet. The laboratory—cold, sterile, humming with faint echoes—suddenly felt like a sanctuary. A place only for them.

They moved closer without being conscious of steps, as if some invisible gravity pulled them until there was

no more space between heartbeats. Lisa's restless energy melted into Aubery's stillness, and his silence turned into a language only she understood. Their embrace was not hurried, not reckless, but aching with the desperation of souls that had waited too long.

It wasn't about bodies hungering for each other—it was about two beings who could no longer carry the ache of absence. Their closeness became a prayer, their whispered breaths a promise, and their nearness an answer to every fear Lisa had just poured into words.

For the first time in days, neither of them felt hollow.

The days slipped into weeks, and in that time Lisa and Aubery found themselves caught in a rhythm that was equal parts exhilarating and dangerous. What had started as fleeting glances across the office floor—eyes that stole seconds they weren't supposed to take—grew into something bolder, something they could no longer conceal. A brush of fingertips when files exchanged hands, the accidental grazing of shoulders in the corridor, even those invisible threads of longing when they sat in silence during meetings... all of it carried with it an intensity that set their blood racing.

Their connection was undeniable—magnetic, intoxicating—and yet, beneath the warmth of their closeness, cracks quietly began to form.

Lisa had always been the kind to nurture, to care with both words and actions. For her, love meant support—stepping in when she believed she could ease Aubery’s load. She would lean over his desk, tracing her finger across his reports, her brows furrowed in thought, offering insights or pointing out details she worried he might have missed. To her, it was affection disguised as advice, a way of telling him without words: I want you to succeed. I want you to shine.

But to Aubery, the gesture slowly began to feel heavier than intended. What once resembled care started to sound uncomfortably like correction. With every mild suggestion, every “Have you thought of trying it this way?”, he felt a restless stirring inside him, an echo of old frustrations he thought he had buried long ago. It was the same knot in his stomach he used to feel when his mother had treated him as though he were incapable, too clumsy to manage things on his own.

Why can’t she just let me handle it? the thought gnawed at him. He knew Lisa didn’t mean to belittle him, but still... somewhere in the gap between her intention and his perception, resentment began to bloom.

It was subtle at first—a sigh held a fraction too long, a tense silence after her well-meaning interjections. And Lisa noticed. Of course, she did. She always had a way of sensing shifts in emotion, like she could hear the

unspoken words beneath the spoken ones. But the more she tried to tread carefully, the more it felt like they were walking on eggshells, both of them afraid of setting off the other.

A single comment could tip the balance. A careless remark about his work could draw a defensive glare from Aubery. And when his distraction caused him to forget to ask how her day had been, Lisa's heart would sink, quietly convincing herself that she didn't matter as much as he once made her believe.

The tension was no longer just between them either—it had spilled outwards, into the walls of the office itself. Whispers echoed in hallways when they passed by together. Smiles too sharp, comments too subtle to be ignored. It was as if they were being constantly scrutinized, their relationship dissected piece by piece by the people paid to sit only a few feet away.

Lisa, once confident and steady, began to feel like she was wading through glass walls, like she was living in a fishbowl where every blink and breath was measured. Around Aubery she wanted to relax, to be unguarded—but at work, the unrelenting attention made her body knot with tension. Meanwhile, Aubery wrestled with a different kind of suffocation: the sense that his identity was being flattened, reduced not to the work he poured himself into, but to his role as Lisa's partner.

And yet... beneath all this weight, their love refused to let go. That was the cruelest part. Even amid the hurt, the longing did not vanish.

One evening, after another day riddled with misunderstandings and sidelong glances from colleagues, Lisa stood before Aubery, her eyes searching his face as though it held the map to a future, she suddenly wasn't sure of.

Her voice, when it came, was thin, fragile, trembling with both fear and hope.

"Can we make this work?"

The silence between them pressed heavy, stretching time unbearably thin. Aubery's jaw tightened as he met her gaze.

His eyes carried conflict—uncertainty, exhaustion, but beneath it, something stubborn and unyielding.

"I don't know," he admitted softly, the honesty scraping at his throat. The words left a bitter taste, a confession he hated but couldn't swallow.

Then, after a pause that felt like a lifetime: "But I'm willing to try."

Lisa's breath caught, her chest tightening at the quiet determination in his voice. It wasn't a promise. It wasn't certainty. But it was something. And sometimes, love was just that—a fragile, trembling choice you made

in the midst of doubts, simply because walking away felt more unbearable than fighting through.

She reached for his hand, not with the sureness of before, but with hesitation that revealed how much this moment meant. He didn't pull away. Their fingers intertwined, fragile still, but holding.

And in that fragile holding, they both understood: their love was being tested in ways neither had expected. Whether it would endure or fracture, time alone would reveal. But for now, they were still choosing each other—even through the frustration, even though the weight pressing in from all sides.

For now, that had to be enough.

As the sixth month of their relationship approached, Lisa and Aubery had grown more confident in each other. They had navigated the ups and downs of their differences and were learning to appreciate each other's quirks. But little did they know, their relationship was about to face a new challenge.

It was July, and the lab was buzzing with excitement. Three birthdays were lined up in a row, and Aubery and Lisa had decided to get gifts for their colleague Veronica's birthday as a team. The sun beat down on the shopping mall, casting a warm glow over the bustling corridors. Lisa and Aubery walked side by side, their footsteps in sync until they found the perfect gift - a

simple yet elegant lavender tote bag from a good brand. They purchased it and felt satisfied with their choice.

The air was filled with the sweet scent of perfumes and the chatter of shoppers, as they were roaming around the mall, Lisa's phone rang. She felt a jolt of anxiety as she saw the name on the screen. She hesitated, her thumb hovering over the ignore button before finally silencing the call.

Aubery's eyes narrowed, his brow furrowing in concern. "Who was that?" he asked, his voice low and gentle.

Lisa's response was evasive, her words tumbling out in a rush. "Just someone I don't want to talk to."

Aubery noticed her reaction and asked her to call back the person, his voice firm. Lisa seemed reluctant, but Aubery insisted. She dialed the number, and Aubery asked her to keep the phone on speaker. Aubery's expression didn't change, but his eyes seemed to bore into her soul.

Lisa's heart sank, her stomach twisting into knots. She didn't want to talk to this person, didn't want to revisit the past. But Aubery's insistence was like a gentle push, urging her to face her fears.

She dialed the number, her hands shaking slightly as she put the phone on speaker. The voice on the other end was warm and familiar, he is asking how she was

doing and why she hadn't been talking to him lately. Lisa's responses were stilted, her words barely above a whisper, and Aubery could sense the tension in her voice. She replied I'm outside with a friend, I'm doing fine. As he understood that she's outside with someone, the person said, "Text me when you're free. Bye."

As the conversation came to a close, the atmosphere between them had shifted. The warmth of the sun-drenched mall seemed to fade, replaced by an uncomfortable chill. Aubery's eyes never left Lisa's face, his gaze piercing and intense.

"Who was that?" he asked again, his voice low and husky.

Lisa's eyes dropped, her lashes casting a shadow on her cheeks. "Just an old acquaintance," she mumbled, her voice barely audible.

Aubery's eyes narrowed, his jaw clenched in a mixture of frustration and concern. The silence between them was oppressive, the only sound the distant hum of the mall's background noise. The gift they had bought for Veronica seemed forgotten, a mere afterthought in the face of the tension that now hung between them like a challenge.

As they stood there, the world around them melted away, leaving only the two of them, suspended in a moment of uncertainty.

The air was thick with tension as Aubery's questions hung in the air, each one a sharp barb that pierced Lisa's heart. She felt like she was being interrogated, like she was on trial for a crime she didn't commit. The more he questioned her, the more she felt her defenses rising, her frustration and grievance simmering just below the surface.

"How many men have you had in your life?" he asked, his voice laced with accusation.

Aubery's words cut deep, like a knife slicing through her soul. She felt a surge of defensiveness, her mind racing with thoughts of all the times she had been hurt, all the times she had been misunderstood.

"You're the same as the other girls who will go out with every man, right?"

His words were like a slap in the face, a cruel reminder of all the doubts and fears that had haunted her for so long.

Lisa's eyes flashed with anger, her voice trembling with emotion.

"That's not fair," she said, her words barely above a whisper. "I'm not like that. He's just an old acquaintance, someone I knew through my ex-boyfriend."

But Aubery's mind was already made up. He didn't believe her, didn't trust her. He saw her as a cheater, a

liar, someone who was hiding secrets and telling half-truths. His eyes were cold and hard, his gaze piercing as he looked at her.

“Why didn’t you tell him you’re out with your boyfriend?” he asked, his voice dripping with skepticism. “Why are you hiding things from me?”

Lisa tried to explain, to make him understand. “There’s nothing between us,” she said, her voice desperate.

“He’s just someone I knew in the past. We’re not in touch anymore.”

But Aubery wouldn’t listen. He was convinced that Lisa was hiding something, that she was lying to him. His questions were like a never-ending barrage, each one a fresh wound that cut deeper and deeper into her soul.

“How can a friend of an ex-boyfriend call you directly and ask why you’re not talking to him?” he asked, his voice dripping with skepticism. “That’s not logical.”

Lisa felt tears prick at the corners of her eyes. She was trying to be honest with him, to be open and transparent. But he wasn’t listening, wasn’t willing to give her the benefit of the doubt.

As the argument escalated, the issue took a turn in their life. It was no longer just about the phone call or the acquaintance. It was about trust, about honesty, about the foundation of their relationship.

The uncertainty hung in the air, a palpable weight that pressed down on them both. They stood there, frozen in time, their hearts heavy with emotion. The future was uncertain, but one thing was clear: their relationship would never be the same again.

As they walked out of the mall, the bright moonlight seemed to mock Lisa's tears. She felt like she was alone. The frustration and hurt she felt were suffocating her, making it hard to breathe.

She walked alongside the road, not knowing where she was going, just knowing she needed to get away from Aubery. Everyone seemed to be staring at her, their faces a blur as she sobbed uncontrollably. She felt like she was on display, like everyone knew what had happened between her and Aubery.

Aubery caught up to her, the vehicle screeching to a halt beside her. "Get in," he said, his voice cold and detached.

Lisa shook her head, her tears falling onto the pavement. "I don't want to," she said, her voice barely above a whisper.

Aubery's face twisted in anger. "Get in the vehicle, or forget about the kindness I'll...I'll tear you apart," he said, his voice rising. "I don't trust you with anything, that's for sure. But we came here together, and I'm taking you back home. That's it. There's nothing else."

Lisa felt a chill run down her spine as she looked at Aubery. She saw the anger and distrust in his eyes, and she knew she had to get away from him. But she had no choice, no other way to get home. She got into the vehicle, her heart heavy with sorrow.

As they drove to her home, Lisa sobbed uncontrollably. Her gut instincts were screaming at her to leave him, with mixed feelings this is the right time, he's not a right for you, he doesn't love you and he doesn't trust you at all, get out of this toxic relationship. She thought about all the times Aubery had hurt her, all the times he had doubted her. She knew she deserved better.

But as she looked at Aubery, she saw the cold mask he wore. He wasn't going to listen to her, wasn't going to try to understand her. He had already made up his mind about her.

When they reached her home, Lisa got out of the vehicle, her eyes red and puffy from crying. Aubery didn't even look at her, didn't even say goodbye. He just drove away, leaving her standing alone in front of her home.

And then, the ultimate blow. He blocked her. Again. Without even giving her a chance to explain, to tell him the truth. Lisa felt like she was shattered, like her heart had been broken into a million pieces.

She cried herself to sleep that night, her heart heavy with sorrow. She knew she had to move on, to get out of this relationship. But a part of her still held on to the hope that things would get better, that Aubery would realize his mistakes and come back to her.

But deep down, she knew it was just a hope, a fragile thread that might not be enough to hold them together.

The hunger strike had become a manifestation of Lisa's inner turmoil. She stopped eating, stopped talking to people, and started to criticize herself, distrust herself, and even hurt herself. The memories of her past relationships haunted her, making her feel like a whore in her own eyes. She believed that her kindness was being misinterpreted, and that people would always try to breach her private life.

As she walked through the hallway, she spotted Aubery standing at the corner, lost in thought. Her determination fueled her steps as she approached him. She pulled him into the tissue culture lab.

The tissue culture lab was dimly lit, the only sound the soft hum of the equipment. Lisa's eyes locked onto Aubery's, her gaze piercing as she began to speak. Her voice was laced with frustration, hurt, and a deep-seated emotion that threatened to overflow.

"Let's talk," she said, her voice firm but shaking with emotion.

Aubery looked at her, his expression unreadable. "What do you want to talk about?" he asked, his voice cold.

Lisa took a deep breath and started asking him the questions he had pulled before. "How many men have you had in your life?" she repeated, her voice laced with sarcasm. "You're the same as the other girls who will go out with every man, right?"

Aubery's eyes narrowed, his face twisting in anger. "What are you trying to do?" he asked, his voice rising.

Lisa stood her ground, her eyes flashing with determination. "I'm trying to clear the misunderstanding," she said. "I'm trying to explain myself to you. You don't trust me; you don't believe me. But I want you to know the truth."

Aubery's expression softened slightly, but his eyes still held a hint of skepticism. "Go on," he said, his voice a little softer.

"I'm not some kind of girl who goes around flirting with every guy she meets. I'm not a whore, Aubery. I'm a person with feelings, with emotions, with boundaries."

Aubery's expression was unreadable, his eyes narrowed as he listened to her words. Lisa's frustration grew, her voice rising as she continued to speak.

"You don't trust me, Aubery. You don't believe me. You think I'm hiding something, that I'm lying to you.

But I'm not. I'm telling you the truth. That guy, he's just an acquaintance. We knew each other through my ex-boyfriend, and that's it."

Lisa's eyes welled up with tears as she spoke, her emotions raw. She felt vulnerable, like she was standing naked in front of Aubery, but she couldn't help it. She needed him to understand her, to believe her.

"Why can't you just trust me?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper. "Why can't you just believe me?"

Aubery's expression softened slightly, his eyes searching hers. For a moment, Lisa thought she saw a glimmer of understanding, of compassion. But then, his mask slipped back into place, and he looked away.

"I don't know," he said, his voice cold. "I just don't know."

Lisa felt a pang of hurt, of rejection. She knew she had to keep going, to keep fighting. She took a deep breath and continued to speak, her words pouring out of her like a river.

"I'm not perfect, Aubery. I make mistakes. But I'm not a liar. I'm not a cheater. I'm a person who loves with all my heart, who gives everything I have to the people I care about. And if you can't see that, if you can't trust me, then maybe we're not meant to be together."

The words hung in the air, a challenge, a plea, a declaration. Lisa's heart was on her sleeve. Would he

listen? Would he believe her? Only he can answer to her questions stirring in her mind.

Lisa took a deep breath and started to explain, to tell him the truth about her past, about her relationship. She told him about her fears, her doubts, and her feelings. She poured her heart out to him, hoping that he would understand her, believe her.

As she spoke, she felt a sense of vulnerability wash over her. She was exposing herself, her feelings, and her fears. But she knew she had to do it, had to try to make him understand.

Why would he care about her feelings? The thought sent a pang of sadness through her heart, but she refused to give up. She was determined to make him see the truth, to make him understand her.

The memories of her relationship with Tyler still lingered in her mind, a complex mix of emotions and experiences. At first, everything seemed perfect, and Tyler's non-possessive nature was a breath of fresh air. They would meet daily, and Lisa would try to adjust herself to his taste, hoping to build a strong foundation for their relationship.

However, as time went on, Lisa began to realize that Tyler wasn't as stable as she thought. He had a history of situationships, and his habits of drinking and smoking were a cause for concern. Despite this, Lisa tried to change him, to mould him into the partner she wanted.

She encouraged him to prepare for interviews, offering to help him, but Tyler never seemed interested.

As their relationship progressed, Lisa met his parents and visited his home several times. But despite the familiarity, Tyler's responses were always lukewarm. He never opposed her, but he never fully agreed either. Lisa's frustration grew as she tried to push him to get a job, to plan for their future together. Tyler would promise to try, but nothing ever seemed to materialize.

The final blow came when Lisa discovered that Tyler had met one of his old flames, a woman who was already married with children. When confronted, Tyler denied it, but Lisa's doubts had already been sown. She tried to reach out to the woman, who revealed a truth that shattered Lisa's world.

Tyler wasn't in love with her; he was just using her for intimacy. The words cut deep, leaving Lisa feeling broken and betrayed. Her heart and mind were at war, torn between trusting him again and protecting herself from further hurt.

As she reflected on their relationship, Lisa realized that she had been blinded by her love for Tyler. She had ignored the red flags, hoping that he would change for her. But now, she wasn't so sure. Could she trust him again? Was it worth the risk?

The questions swirled in her mind, refusing to settle. Lisa knew she had to make a decision, to choose

between her heart and her head. But as she stood at the crossroads, she couldn't shake off the feeling that she was staring into the unknown, uncertain of what the future held.

The decision to leave Tyler was not an easy one for Lisa. She had invested so much of herself in their relationship, and the thought of walking away was daunting. But she knew she had to do it, for her own sake. She couldn't continue to be in a relationship that was based on lies and manipulation.

Lisa decided to take the first step by leaving her hometown and finding a new job elsewhere. She hoped that distance would help her break free from Tyler's grasp. When she told him about her decision to break up, he was taken aback. He pestered her to know what had happened, but Lisa was resolute.

"Marry me now," she said, testing his commitment. But Tyler hesitated, saying he couldn't marry like that. Lisa's heart sank. She knew then that she had made the right decision.

"That's why I'm breaking up with you," she said, her voice firm. "I don't have time for your things. I need someone who can provide for me, who can take care of me. You're not that person."

Tyler's face fell, and for a moment, Lisa saw a glimmer of sadness in his eyes. But she knew it was just

a facade. She had seen the truth, and she couldn't unsee it.

As she walked away from him, Lisa felt a sense of relief wash over her. She was finally free from the toxic relationship that had been draining her energy. But she knew it wouldn't be easy. She would have to rebuild herself, rediscover her own identity and purpose.

Tyler had shown her a magical world, one that was full of promise and excitement. But it was all a facade, a carefully constructed illusion. Lisa was grateful for the experience, but she knew she deserved better. She deserved someone who would love her truly, without manipulation or lies.

As she looked back on their relationship, Lisa realized that she had been blinded by her love for Tyler. She had ignored the red flags, hoping that he would change for her. But now she saw the truth. She had been living in a dream world, one that was not real. She called it as a fairy-tale love as it'll never be true.

Her life was never an easy path but with Tyler she felt its easy. When she realized its actually looking easy because of the person is not being true. When she was with him, she tried to help him finding jobs and he wanted to be an actor for which she tried to get in touch with few people through her mutual contacts. Even though she tried all these nothing worked out with him.

The memories of their time together still lingered in her mind, but Lisa knew she had to let go. She had to move on, to find someone who would love her for who she was. And she was determined to do just that.

The aftermath of leaving Tyler was a challenging and tumultuous time for Lisa. She had thought that ending the relationship would bring her peace, but instead, it seemed to unleash a new wave of problems. The people she had gotten to know through Tyler, the ones she had thought were mutual friends or acquaintances, began to make her life miserable.

Every day, they would call or message her, asking her to meet up or hang out. It was as if they felt they owned her, and Lisa's patience began to wear thin. She tried to get away from them, but a few persistent individuals refused to leave her alone.

It was like a game to them, a challenge to see how far they could push her. Lisa's stress levels skyrocketed, and she felt like she was losing her grip on her life. She knew she had to take drastic measures to protect herself.

With a newfound determination, Lisa cut off all contact with her old friends, colleagues, and mutual acquaintances. She blocked their numbers, avoided social media, and did everything she could to distance herself from the toxic influences that had taken over her life.

It was a difficult and painful process, but Lisa knew it was necessary. She was determined to start fresh, to leave the chaos of her past behind her. And as she looked to the future, she felt a sense of hope and renewal. She was ready to take control of her life, to create a new reality for herself.

As she moved forward, Lisa felt a sense of empowerment wash over her. She was taking charge of her life, and she was ready to face whatever challenges came her way. She knew it wouldn't be easy, but she was determined to create a better future for herself, one that was free from the toxic influences of her past.

The person who had called her when she was with Aubery is the one who had pestered her since her time with Tyler. His name is Shawn.

As she finished speaking, Lisa felt a sense of relief wash over her. She had exposed herself, her feelings, and her fears. Now, it was up to Aubery to decide whether he would listen, whether he would believe her.

As she's walking through the hallway, the memories of Tyler still lingered in her mind like a ghostly presence, haunting her every waking moment. She couldn't help but think about the way he had made her feel, the way he had touched her heart and soul. She had loved him with every fiber of her being, with a passion that had consumed her completely.

Lisa's life had been a complex web of emotions and experiences, shaped by her upbringing and her interactions with the world around her. As a girl, she had faced numerous challenges that many of her peers could relate to, but her perspective on these experiences had led her to feel like her life was uniquely difficult.

Growing up, Lisa's parents had encouraged her to be strong and independent, like a boy, in order to protect herself in a society that often seemed hostile to women. As a result, she had developed a tomboyish persona and had learned to navigate the world with a sense of caution.

Despite her tough exterior, Lisa had a deep-seated desire for kindness, gentleness, and love. She longed for someone who would treat her with compassion and understanding, someone she could trust without hesitation.

When she met Tyler, Lisa thought she had found that person. She trusted him, and she believed that he would be the one to change her life for the better.

At first, Tyler had been the perfect lover, the perfect partner. He had showered her with attention and affection, making her feel like she was the only person in the world. He had listened to her, understood her, and made her feel seen and heard. She had felt a deep connection with him, a sense of belonging that she had never experienced before.

But as time went on, Lisa began to realize that Tyler's love was not what it seemed. He had been playing a role, pretending to be someone he was not. He had used her vulnerability and trust to manipulate her, to control her. And when she had finally seen the truth, she had been devastated.

The feeling of betrayal was like a knife to her heart, cutting deep and leaving a wound that would take a long time to heal. She had trusted Tyler with her deepest secrets, her darkest fears. She had given him her heart, her soul, her everything. And he had thrown it all away, like it meant nothing to him.

Lisa felt like she had been living in a dream world, a world where love and trust were the only things that mattered. But when she woke up to reality, she was faced with the harsh truth. Tyler's love was not real, it was just a facade. He had used her for his own pleasure, his own gratification. And she had been blind to it, blinded by her own love and desire.

The pain of betrayal was like a weight that pressed down on her, making it hard to breathe. She felt like she was drowning in a sea of emotions, unable to escape the waves of hurt and anger that crashed over her. She didn't know how to process her feelings, how to make sense of the chaos that had been unleashed in her life.

The experience had been traumatic, and it had left her feeling lost and uncertain about her future. She was

forced to confront the harsh realities of the world and the people in it, and she was left wondering if she would ever find the kind of love and acceptance, she so desperately craved.

As she navigated the dark waters of her emotions, Lisa realized that she had to confront the truth. She had to face the fact that Tyler's love was not real, that he had used her and manipulated her. She had to acknowledge the pain and the hurt that she had suffered, and find a way to heal. It wouldn't be easy, but she knew she had to try. She had to find a way to move on, to rebuild her life and her sense of self. And she was determined to do just that.

As Aubery listened to Lisa's story, his expression transformed from curiosity to concern, and finally, to a deep sense of empathy. He hadn't known about the traumatic experiences she had endured, and he wasn't sure how to process the information. The weight of her pain and vulnerability settled in, and he felt a strong urge to be there for her.

Without hesitation, Aubery unblocked Lisa and reached out to her. "Hello," he said softly, trying to break the ice.

Lisa's response was hesitant, a simple "Hmm..." that conveyed her uncertainty.

Aubery tried to lighten the mood, “Let’s go eat something, you must be hungry.” He suggested, hoping to take her mind off the painful memories.

As they sat down to eat, Aubery bought her favourite sweets, and asked her about her breakup with Tyler. “How many days have passed since you broke up with Tyler?” he asked gently.

Lisa replied, “Maybe almost 2 years.”

Aubery’s eyes locked onto hers, “You didn’t feel like talking to him ever again?” His tone was laced with concern, and a hint of curiosity.

Lisa’s eyes dropped, and she began to recount her journey. “Initially, I used to think about Tyler a lot, used to cry and suffer in silence. But later on, I had to move on. I thought about it a lot, and I realized I needed to focus on myself.”

Lisa’s eyes overflowed with tears, and Aubery pulled her into a warm hug. She felt safe in his arms, protected and cared for. For the first time in a long time, she felt like she could breathe again, like the weight of her secrets had been lifted off her shoulders.

Aubery listened intently, his expression a mix of compassion and understanding.

Lisa continued, “When I met you, I completely forgot that all this happened in my life. You were a change in my life, a breath of fresh air.

Lisa's heart swelled with emotion, and she felt a deep connection to Aubery. She knew that she could trust him, that he would be there for her no matter what. And in that moment, she felt a spark of love ignite within her.

As they pulled back from the hug, Aubery's eyes locked onto Lisa's, and he could see the emotion shining back at him. He smiled softly, and took her hand again.

The air was filled with a sense of possibility, and Lisa felt like she was walking into a new chapter of her life. She knew that she still had a long way to go, but with Aubery by her side, she felt like she could face anything.

As they walked, Aubery's presence was a balm to her soul. He was gentle, kind, and caring, and Lisa felt like she could be herself around him. She knew that she had found someone special, someone who would love and support her through the ups and downs of life.

And as they looked into each other's eyes, Lisa knew that she was falling deeply in love with Aubery. She felt seen, heard, and understood in a way that she never had before. And she knew that she would do anything to be with him, to be near him, and to feel his love and support.

Your presence made a lot of changes in my life, and I've fallen for you again."

Aubery's face softened, and he smiled warmly. He was glad to have been a part of her journey, to have brought some positivity into her life. As they finished their meal, Aubery knew that he wanted to be there for Lisa, to support her, and to help her heal.

As Lisa lay in bed, her mind was a whirlwind of thoughts and doubts. She had revealed her deepest secrets to Aubery, and she couldn't help but wonder how he would react. Would he still see her as the same person he had fallen for, or would her past define her in his eyes?

She tossed and turned, her thoughts racing with uncertainty. She couldn't shake off the feeling that Aubery's perception of her had changed, that he might see her as damaged or tainted by her past experiences.

As she lay there, Lisa's phone buzzed with an incoming message from Aubery. She picked it up, her heart racing with anticipation. But instead of a long message or a call, she saw a simple text that made her heart skip a beat: "Lisa, don't think much about anything. Sleep now. You're tired. You need rest."

The words were like a gentle caress, soothing her frazzled nerves and calming her racing thoughts. Lisa felt a wave of reassurance wash over her, and her eyelids grew heavy. She knew that Aubery was right; she did need rest.

As she drifted off to sleep, Lisa felt a sense of peace settle over her. She knew that she had found someone special in Aubery, someone who would love and accept

her for who she was, past and all. And with that thought, she smiled softly to herself, feeling grateful for the love and support that Aubery had brought into her life.

In that moment, Lisa knew that she was exactly where she was meant to be. She was safe, she was loved, and she was cherished. And as she slept, surrounded by the darkness of the night, she felt Aubery's presence around her, a warm and comforting glow that filled her heart with joy and peace.

Aubery sat in his dimly lit room, the silence a stark contrast to the turmoil brewing inside him. The fight with Lisa still lingered in his mind, her words echoing like a haunting melody. He couldn't shake off the image of her tears, her vulnerability, and her raw emotion as she shared her past.

As he replayed their love story in his head, Aubery realized that he had been blinded by his own fears and doubts. He thought about the way Lisa's eyes sparkled when she laughed, the way her smile could light up a room, and the way her touch sent shivers down his spine.

As he watched Lisa struggle with her thoughts and doubts, Aubery knew he had to be there for her. He wanted to be her safe haven, her rock, and her partner in every sense of the word.

When he sent her that simple text, "Lisa, don't think much about anything. Sleep now. You're tired. You need rest," he meant every word. He wanted her to

know that he was there, that he cared, and that she didn't have to face her fears alone.

Aubery's love for Lisa wasn't about fixing her or changing her; it was about accepting her for who she was, past and all. He knew that her experiences had shaped her into the strong, beautiful person she was today. And he was grateful to be a part of her journey, to support her, and to love her without condition.

As Aubery's thoughts swirled with images of Lisa, he couldn't shake the feeling that their connection was something special. When her call came in the first time, her voice was like a gentle breeze on a summer day, soothing and calming. He was drawn to her presence, despite initial doubts about who she was or what she might be like.

The interview panel wasn't intimidating to him—he had faced tougher boards, colder silences—but what stirred him in that interview was her. Lisa. Sitting with poise at the end of the table, quiet yet somehow anchoring everything. He had caught her glance from time to time, not because she had looked directly at him but because her presence carried an attentiveness that was impossible not to notice.

And then, that tiny unexpected thread—the message on his phone.

“Are you online? Join ASAP, they're waiting for you...”

“Joined. Thanks,” he had typed it quickly, almost without thought, and her reply had made his lips curve before he could stop it.

For a moment—not in front of the stern gaze of Mrs. Kaira or Mr. Jackson—but for himself, he felt like the interview was less about securing a position and more about being seen, acknowledged in a way he hadn’t been in a long while.

Truth was, Aubery carried a kind of weariness he rarely let anyone glimpse. On the surface, confidence clung to his words, and politeness framed his gestures. But beneath, he was a landscape of closed doors. Past relationship had left him with lessons written in sharp ink—trust can wound, vulnerability exposes, and sometimes the very people you lean on are the ones who let you fall hardest. Each scar had taught him to hold back, to give pieces only in measured amounts, to appear whole even when he was quietly fractured.

The Delay

When Lisa had called him after his delayed response to the offer letter, her voice had been friendly—professional, even—but something about the way she lingered on his name, the quiet hope tucked beneath her words, made him hesitate as he answered. He heard himself apologizing, giving reasons about his current job and the logistics of transport. What he didn’t say was this:

He was afraid.

Not of work, not of moving, but of walking into yet another new beginning. Fresh starts weren't liberating for him anymore. They weren't empty canvases waiting for paint—they were weighty reminders of everything he had once lost. He had learned this: where there is hope, there can also be hurt.

But Lisa hadn't pressed him. Not really. Instead, she had walked the line between persistence and care, confirming timelines, asking truthfully if he was committed.

He saw when she messaged, and at first, he let the silence sit between them. A test—for himself more than for her. Will she grow impatient? Will she withdraw? Or will she wait?

And she had waited.

Aubery learned something in that moment: gentle patience can touch places defensiveness never lets anyone near. It softened him more than he wanted to admit.

Meeting Lisa

Walking into the premises the following day, he hadn't expected much. A job, colleagues, a new rhythm. He told himself to keep steady, detached. But when he stood waiting outside the office and saw Lisa approach, her hair tied neatly back, her eyes darting with both

purpose and some unspoken curiosity—he felt something warm move through his chest.

Her smile when she greeted him was disarming, genuine without flourish. And when their hands met in the simplest handshake, for the first time in a long while, he didn't feel guarded. Something in her presence made his habitual caution falter.

Lisa had guided him through the joining formalities like it was the most important task of her day. And maybe to her it was duty, but to him, it was strangely grounding. She wasn't posturing, wasn't trying to impress him like others often had. Her simple attention—explaining processes, pausing to see if he followed—made him feel worthy of time rather than tolerated for skill.

He found himself watching her when she turned away, memorizing details: the way she bit her lip while checking forms, how her laughter carried quietly when a colleague passed a joke. These were ordinary things, forgettable to others perhaps, but he had been starved of ordinaries that felt safe.

The Butterflies He Didn't Believe In

When he had told her, her smile was cute, he hadn't planned it. The words simply broke through the cracks in his caution. He saw the flush on her cheeks, the quick widening of her eyes—and he realized that he hadn't just

seen her. He had also let her see him, unguarded and sincere.

That terrified him.

And yet, it thrilled him.

When she responded by complimenting his eyes, her voice trailing as though she'd surprised herself, he felt a pull. A quiet knowing: this connection isn't one-sided.

Vulnerability

At coffee, when he had ordered juice for her—without knowing it was her favourite—it had startled him too. Aubery didn't believe in coincidences easily, but some part of him wondered if their lives were threads meant to touch, however briefly. His concern about her drinking the night before spilled out awkwardly; he feared sounding controlling, and yet he couldn't stop himself. Concern was his instinct, but it came from a place of care he had repressed for so long.

She hadn't dismissed it outright. She had explained, reassured, almost gently accepted the worry behind his words. And with that, another layer of his guardedness peeled back.

The Moment of Truth

Walking her home that evening, teasing lightly about her "boyfriend," had been an experiment. He

wanted to measure her closeness, see if what he felt was imagination. Her answer—that she had no one—hit him harder than he'd expected. Not relief alone, but a realization: I care enough to want an answer.

When she asked him what he thought of her, the instinct was to deflect, to say something playful. But when he looked into her eyes—a mix of courage and quiet fear—he couldn't. His answer, spoken softly, was the truest thing he had voiced in a long while.

“You're incredible... a woman of substance. Fierce, gentle, kind.”

When their lips finally met in the hushed glow of the night, it wasn't passion that overwhelmed him; it was peace. A rare, profound stillness inside him, as if finally, for a moment, his scattered pieces didn't need to pretend—they had found a place where they could belong. Aubery felt like he had found a missing piece of himself, someone who understood him without judgment.

Aubery's Lesson

That night, as he lay awake replaying every detail—the warmth of her smile, the trust in her question, the quiet boldness in her kiss—he understood something.

Love, perhaps, wasn't about grand declarations or dramatic risks. Real connection came in vulnerability—the willingness to let someone see the fears you usually

hide, the lessons you usually guard like armour. Lisa, without demanding, had coaxed him into honesty by simply being herself.

For years, Aubery had believed love meant loss, or compromise, or expectation. But maybe—it could also mean growth. Maybe love was giving, not in half-measures, but in sincerity. Maybe, this time, he didn't need to keep the doors closed.

He drifted to sleep knowing this: Lisa had stirred a part of him he thought was long buried. And if he was brave enough to keep showing up—with honesty instead of shields—he could rewrite the story he once thought was over.

“This... this wasn't an ending.

It was the first chapter of who he was learning to become.”

The next morning, Lisa woke up feeling refreshed and renewed. She knew that she still had a long way to go, that her past would always be a part of her. But she also knew that she wasn't alone, that Aubery would be there to support her every step of the way.

And with that knowledge, she felt a sense of hope and optimism that she hadn't felt in a long time. She was ready to face whatever came next, knowing that she had Aubery by her side.

The chill of winter had long since passed, but Lisa's heart remained frosty, a protective barrier she had erected around herself. After the issue, she had found it difficult to share her feelings with Aubery, the man she loved. The words he had spoken had pierced her heart like a thousand daggers, leaving behind a wound that refused to heal.

Though she was cold towards him, Lisa didn't avoid Aubery. She continued to live with him, to share meals and moments, but her guard remained firmly in place. She didn't want to let him in, didn't want to give him the chance to hurt her again. Her irritation and frustration simmered just below the surface, but she kept them hidden, locked away behind a mask of indifference.

But deep down, Lisa's mind replayed the words, reliving the pain and hurt. She couldn't shake the feeling that Aubery didn't truly understand her, that he didn't care about her feelings. As a result, she felt stagnant, unwilling to grow further in their relationship. The thought of opening herself up to him again, of being vulnerable and exposed, terrified her.

Aubery, sensing the distance between them, tried to understand Lisa in his own way. He showed concern for her, for her issues, and for her feelings. He started to help her heal, to give her the space and time she needed to trust him again. His patience and kindness were like a

balm to her soul, soothing the hurt and calming the storm.

As the days passed, Aubery's schedule became increasingly busy. He was consumed by work, meetings, and deadlines, but despite the chaos, he never forgot to care for Lisa. Every morning, he would arrange breakfast for her, waiting patiently until she ate. It was a small gesture, but one that spoke volumes about his love and devotion.

Lisa, slowly but surely, began to forget the pain of the past. She started to live in the present, to enjoy the moments they shared, and to appreciate the love that Aubery showed her. The coldness in her heart began to thaw, replaced by a warmth that spread through her veins like honey.

As her birthday approached, Lisa felt a flutter of excitement. She and Aubery had planned to celebrate, to go shopping and make memories. They had talked about dinner, about cake, and about gifts. Lisa couldn't wait to see what Aubery had planned, to feel like the queen of the day.

Together, they wandered through the stores, laughing and joking, their fingers intertwined. Lisa felt happy, truly happy, for the first time in weeks. She knew that Aubery loved her, that he would always be there for her, and that thought filled her with joy.

But little did she know, the day ahead would test their love in ways she never could have imagined.

The day has come. Lisa's eyes sparkled as she walked into the room, expecting to see Aubery waiting for her with a birthday surprise. But instead, she found him buried in his work, his brow furrowed in concentration. Her heart sank, and a pang of disappointment washed over her.

"When will you come?" she asked, trying to keep her tone light. "When will we go out?"

Her voice carries a hint of longing, tinged with the weight of unmet expectations.

Aubery, engrossed in his work, looks up, his eyes squinting slightly as he processes the question. He glances at the clock, realizing the late hour, and rubs the back of his neck, a gesture of fatigue. "I'm sorry, Lisa. I'm running really behind schedule. I know we had plans for tonight, but I don't think I'll be able to make it out as planned," he says, his voice laced with regret.

Lisa's expression falters, her eyes dropping slightly as she processes his words. She had been looking forward to celebrating her birthday with him, and the excitement had been building up all day. The cake-cutting earlier had been a nice gesture, but she had been anticipating a more intimate celebration in the evening.

“Okay,” she says softly, trying not to let her disappointment show.

“But can we at least spend some time together tonight? Even if it’s just for a little while?”

Her voice is tinged with hope, and she looks at him with pleading eyes.

Aubery’s face softens, and he puts down his work. He got up from his chair and walked over to her, his eyes filled with love and concern.

“Hey, I’m sorry,” he said, wrapping his arms around her. “I know how much you were looking forward to tonight. I’ll make it up to you, I promise.” Let me just wrap up a few things here, and then I’ll be all yours,” he says, his voice filled with reassurance.

Lisa felt a warmth spread through her body as she leaned into his embrace. She loved the way he smelled, the way his arms felt around her. She loved the way he made her feel, like she was the only person in the world.

As they hugged, Lisa couldn’t help but laugh at the absurdity of it all. “You’re always busy,” she said, her voice muffled against his chest. “But I love you anyway.”

Aubery chuckled and pulled back, his eyes crinkling at the corners. “I love you too,” he said. “And I’ll make it up to you, I promise. Let’s plan something special for tonight, just the two of us.”

Lisa's heart swelled with love and gratitude. She knew that Aubery was busy, but she also knew that he loves her, and that he would always try to make time for her. She smiled, feeling the cold dread melt away, replaced by a sense of warmth and connection.

As they planned their special night, Lisa felt her disappointment fade away, replaced by excitement and anticipation. She knew that with Aubery, every day was an adventure, and every night was a chance to laugh, love, and create memories together.

"I love you," she said, her voice barely above a whisper.

"I love you too," Aubery replied, his eyes shining with love and adoration. "Happy birthday, my love."

As Lisa waited for Aubery, her phone buzzed with an influx of messages from friends and family, each one wishing her a happy birthday. She smiled, feeling a warmth spread through her chest as she read the kind words. But despite the joy these messages brought, her eyes kept drifting to the clock, her mind fixated on Aubery's arrival. She couldn't help but feel a mix of emotions: excitement for the plans they had made, and a hint of anxiety about how the night would unfold.

Just as she was starting to feel a bit restless, her phone rang. She glanced at the screen and saw Alex's name flashing. She answered the call, expecting a friendly birthday wish, but Alex's tone was different. He

asked her to come to the conference hall, his voice low and mysterious.

“Why do you want me to come?” Lisa asked, her curiosity piqued.

“I just need you to come,” Alex replied, his insistence sending a shiver down her spine.

Lisa looked at Aubery, who was still engrossed in his work, and decided to investigate. She excused herself and headed to the conference hall, but when she arrived, she found it empty. She tried calling Alex back, but his phone wasn’t connecting. Confused and a bit concerned, she returned to Aubery.

As she entered the room, Aubery looked up, his eyes locking onto hers. “Hey, what’s going on?” he asked, noticing the puzzled expression on her face.

Lisa explained the strange call from Alex, and Aubery’s expression changed. His mind began to run through a myriad of emotions and possibilities, and without thinking, he asked her, “Why is he calling you at this time?”

Lisa felt a surge of defensiveness. “I don’t know,” she replied, her voice firm. “I’m just as confused as you are.”

Just then, Alex called again. This time, Lisa put him on speakerphone, her heart racing with anticipation.

“What do you want, Alex?” she asked, trying to keep her tone neutral.

“I wanted to give you a surprise for your birthday,” Alex said, his voice dripping with an unsettling enthusiasm.

Lisa’s heart began to shiver. Why would Alex want to give her a surprise? She felt Aubery’s eyes on her, his gaze intense and watchful. “I’m not interested,” she said firmly. “I’m at home, and I have plans for tonight. Don’t call me again.”

But Alex persisted, his voice growing more insistent. Lisa glanced at Aubery, whose face had turned cold and hard. She felt a shiver run down her spine as she realized the situation was escalating. She decided to cut the call short, her voice firm. “Listen, I really don’t like these surprises, and we’re not close enough to celebrate. I have plans for tonight. Don’t call me. Bye.”

As she ended the call, Lisa felt a sense of relief wash over her. She looked at Aubery, whose expression was still tense, and wondered what he was thinking. Was he upset? Jealous? Or just concerned for her safety? She didn’t know, but she knew she had to reassure him that it was nothing to do with her.

As Aubery’s words cut deep, Lisa’s heart felt like it was shattering into a million pieces. The pain and frustration that had been building up inside her finally burst forth, and she couldn’t hold back her tears

anymore. She started sobbing, her body shaking with each ragged breath as she tried to process the emotions that were overwhelming her.

Aubery's face was a picture of concern as he watched her break down. He could see the hurt and despair in her eyes, and it tore at his heart. He pulled her into his arms, holding her close as he gently wiped away her tears. "Hey, I'm sorry," he whispered, his voice soft and soothing. "I was just concerned about you. That type of people can be trouble, and I don't want anything to happen to you."

Lisa felt a wave of relief wash over her as she realized Aubery's concerns were genuine. He wasn't jealous or possessive; he was just looking out for her well-being. She took a deep breath, feeling her tears dry as she looked up at him. His eyes were filled with kindness and compassion, and she felt her heart swell with love for him.

As they composed themselves, Aubery asked her to get ready, and they went out for a walk. The evening air was filled with a soft drizzle, but they didn't let it dampen their spirits. Instead, they laughed and talked, enjoying each other's company as they strolled hand in hand. The romantic atmosphere was palpable, and Lisa felt like she was walking on cloud nine.

The sound of raindrops hitting the pavement created a soothing melody, and the smell of wet earth

filled the air. Lisa felt alive, feeling the cool breeze on her skin and Aubery's warm hand in hers. They walked in comfortable silence, enjoying each other's presence, and the world around them seemed to fade away.

As they reached the restaurant, Lisa's eyes widened in surprise. The ambiance was intimate and cozy, with soft music playing in the background and candles flickering on the tables. Aubery had reserved a table by the window, and they sat down, feeling like they were in their own little world.

The food was exquisite, and they savoured each bite, enjoying the flavours and textures. Lisa felt like she was in heaven, with Aubery's company making every moment special. They lingered over dessert, their conversation flowing easily as they talked about everything and nothing.

As the night wore on, they decided to take some photos. The moon was full overhead, casting a silver glow over the city. Aubery pulled out his phone, and they posed for photos, laughing and joking as they tried to capture the perfect shot. Lisa felt carefree and happy, enjoying the moment and the company.

Aubery gifted her a beautiful handbag, one that she had been eyeing for a while. It was a thoughtful gesture, and she felt touched by his consideration. "I love it," she said, her eyes shining with happiness. "Thank you so much."

This gift was a reminder of the choker he had given her from Sydney, the one that made her feel like a queen. She looked stunning in it, and Aubery couldn't help but gaze at her with admiration. He felt like her knight, her protector, and her partner in every sense of the word.

Aubery smiled, feeling happy that she liked the gift. "I'm glad you like it," he said, his voice filled with warmth. "You deserve everything beautiful in life, and I'm happy to be a part of it."

As they walked hand in hand, the moon above them seemed to shine brighter, as if jealous of the love that radiated between them. But Lisa and Aubery didn't notice; they were too busy basking in the warmth of their love, too caught up in the magic of this special night. They felt like they were in their own little world, a world filled with love, laughter, and happiness.

As their relationship deepened, Lisa and Aubery found themselves growing more and more close, their bond strengthening with each passing day. The connection between them was palpable, and they could sense each other's emotions without needing words. Despite the occasional fights, they were able to resolve their differences quickly, thanks to their willingness to understand each other's perspectives. Their love was built on a foundation of trust, respect, and open communication, and they cherished every moment they spent together.

Aubery's work was also flourishing, and he seemed to be taking on more responsibilities with ease. His confidence and competence were inspiring, and Lisa couldn't help but feel a sense of pride and admiration for the way he handled his workload. However, she was also worried about the toll it might take on him. She knew that he was pushing himself to the limit, and she wanted to help him in any way she could. The thought of him overworking himself kept her up at night, and she wished she could do more to support him.

Without Aubery's knowledge, Lisa started to help him discreetly. She would take care of tasks that he needed to do, working behind the scenes to ensure that everything ran smoothly. She was happy to support him in any way she could, and she knew that he would do the same for her. The feeling of being able to contribute to his success gave her a sense of purpose, and she felt grateful to be able to play a role in his life.

But just as life was starting to settle into a comfortable routine, disaster struck. Lisa fell ill, and she was bedridden for days. She was so weak that she couldn't even move, and Aubery was beside her with worry. He took care of her like a father, feeding her, administering her medication, and making sure she was comfortable. His touch was gentle, and his voice was soothing, and Lisa felt a sense of relief wash over her whenever he was near.

Despite her illness, Lisa was touched by Aubery's kindness and devotion. She knew that he was working hard to take care of her, and she felt grateful for his love and support. She looked up at him, her eyes filled with tears, and saw the concern etched on his face. "I'm so sorry to be such a burden," she whispered, her voice barely audible.

Aubery's expression softened, and he took her hand in his. "You're not a burden, Lisa," he said gently. "You're the love of my life, and I'll do anything to take care of you." His words were like a balm to her soul, and she felt a sense of peace wash over her.

As the days passed, Lisa slowly started to recover, thanks to Aubery's care and attention. She was amazed by his patience and dedication, and she felt grateful to have him by her side. But even as she regained her strength, Lisa couldn't shake off the feeling of weakness that lingered deep within her. She knew that she needed to get back home and start taking care of herself again. She couldn't bear the thought of Aubery working so hard to take care of her, and she knew that she needed to be strong for him as well.

"I think it's time for me to go home," she said finally, her voice barely above a whisper. "I don't want you to have to take care of me anymore. You're working too hard, and I don't want to be a burden." She looked up at him, her eyes searching for understanding.

Aubery looked at her, his eyes filled with understanding. "You're not a burden, Lisa," he said gently. "I told you this before as well and I'll do anything to take care of you. But if you feel like you're ready to go home, I'll support you." He smiled, and his eyes crinkled at the corners. "I'll make sure you're safe and happy, always."

As Lisa started coming to the office, the whispers began. Colleagues would glance at her and Aubery, their eyes filled with a mixture of curiosity and envy. Their love was growing stronger with each passing day, and it seemed to be making some people uncomfortable.

Paislynn, a colleague who had initially been friendly with Lisa, seemed to have changed her tune. She would often approach Aubery, laughing and chatting with him about work-related topics even though Aubery is not showing interest. As a soft spoken and Kind hearted person Aubery won't be able to turn back easily, but Lisa couldn't help but notice the way she would lean in close to him, her body language screaming flirtation.

Lisa's instincts told her that something was off, and she couldn't shake the feeling that Paislynn was trying to stir up trouble. She knew that Paislynn had a history of manipulating situations to her advantage, and she wondered if she was targeting Aubery now.

Despite the potential drama unfolding around them, Lisa and Aubery's relationship remained strong.

They had a deep understanding of each other, and they prioritized clearing up any misunderstandings that arose. Their love was built on trust, respect, and open communication, and they weren't about to let anyone come between them.

As Paislynn continued to cozy up to Aubery, Lisa watched with a keen eye. Let her colleague's intentions become clear, she would be ready to take action. But for now, she trusted Aubery to see through Paislynn's facade and handle the situation with ease.

Aubery, sensing Lisa's gaze, turned to her and smiled. "Hey, everything okay?" he asked, his voice low and soothing.

Lisa nodded, her eyes locking onto his. "Yeah, everything's fine," she replied, her voice barely above a whisper.

Aubery's eyes crinkled at the corners as he smiled, and Lisa felt her heart skip a beat. She knew that she was lucky to have him, and she was determined to protect their love from anyone who tried to come between them.

As the days turned into weeks, Lisa and Aubery's affection for each other only grew stronger. They found themselves constantly meddling in each other's work, their professions seemingly irrelevant as they seamlessly blended into each other's worlds.

Lisa would often help Aubery brainstorm ideas to reduce his work on the ongoing project, while Aubery would offer valuable insights into Lisa's administrative tasks.

Their love was blossoming, and they couldn't get enough of each other's company. Aubery would surprise Lisa with her favorite pastries, while Lisa would help Aubery pick out new book titles for him. They were each other's rock, supporting and encouraging each other every step of the way.

But as their happiness reached new heights, a subtle shadow began to creep into their lives. A new person entered their world, one who would soon disrupt the harmony they had built.

As Lisa sat in the conference room, taking minutes of the meeting between the Neurology HOD and other colleagues, she noticed a tall, dark-haired man with a sharp jawline and piercing brown eyes. He introduced himself as Dr. Sheldon, a neurosurgery resident, and Lisa's professional demeanour kicked in as she focused on taking notes.

Their initial interactions were brief and strictly professional. However, as the days went by, Lisa found herself stuck in the hospital's administrative office, waiting for feedback on her drafts or attending review sessions with Dr. Sheldon and the HOD. She couldn't

help but notice the way Dr. Sheldon's eyes seemed to bore into her soul, as if searching for something.

One day, as they were discussing a particularly complex case, Dr. Sheldon leaned in close, his voice low and intense. "You're very thorough, Lisa. I like that." Lisa felt a shiver run down her spine, unsure how to respond. She brushed it off as a professional compliment, but the way he looked at her made her feel like he saw right through her.

As the meetings continued, Lisa started to feel a growing sense of unease whenever Dr. Sheldon was around. She couldn't quite put her finger on it, but something about him made her feel like she was walking on eggshells.

And then, one day, Dr. Sheldon asked her to stay behind after a meeting. "Lisa, can I talk to you for a minute?" he asked, his voice low and serious.

Lisa's heart skipped a beat as she nodded, wondering what this could be about. Was it work-related, or was there something more to it? As she waited for him to speak, she felt a sense of anticipation mixed with fear, unsure of what was to come.

"Yes, Dr. Sheldon? What is it?" Lisa asked, trying to sound calm.

Dr. Sheldon's eyes locked onto hers, and for a moment, Lisa felt like she was trapped in his gaze. "I just

wanted to discuss some...additional details about the project," he said, his voice dripping with an intensity that made Lisa's skin prickle.

Lisa's instincts told her that something wasn't quite right, but she couldn't quite pinpoint what it was. She leaned forward; her pen poised over her notebook. "What kind of details?" she asked, her voice firm but polite.

Dr. Sheldon's smile was enigmatic, and Lisa felt a shiver run down her spine. "Let's just say...I'm interested in your perspective on certain aspects of the project," he said, his eyes glinting with an unnerving intensity.

When Lisa walked out of the meeting room, she felt a wave of discomfort wash over her. Dr. Sheldon's words still lingered in her mind, making her skin crawl. She quickened her pace, eager to put some distance between herself and the unsettling atmosphere that Dr. Sheldon seemed to create.

But as she turned a corner, she saw Aubery waiting for her by the coffee machine. His warm smile and gentle eyes were like a balm to her frazzled nerves. Lisa's eyes filled with a sense of trust, support, and hope as she walked towards him.

Aubery noticed the tension in her shoulders and the faint lines on her forehead.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” he asked, his voice filled with concern.

Lisa hesitated, unsure of how to respond. She didn’t want to burden Aubery with her concerns about Dr. Sheldon. She wanted to protect him from the stress and anxiety that seemed to be building up inside her. But more than that, she wanted to shield herself from the possibility of Aubery’s worry and overreaction.

“Nothing, just a long day,” Lisa replied, forcing a smile onto her face.

Aubery’s eyes lingered on hers, as if searching for the truth. But he knew better than to push her.

Instead, he wrapped his arms around her, pulling her into a warm hug.

“You’re safe with me,” he whispered, his voice filled with reassurance.

Lisa felt a wave of relief wash over her as she melted into Aubery’s arms. The tension in her shoulders began to dissipate, replaced by a sense of calm and security. She knew that she could trust Aubery with anything, but she also knew that she didn’t want to add to his worries.

As they pulled back, Aubery handed her a cup of coffee.

“Let’s grab some fresh air,” he suggested, nodding towards the park outside.

Lisa nodded, feeling grateful for the distraction. As they walked side by side, the warm sunshine and gentle breeze seemed to wash away some of the unease that Dr. Sheldon had created. Lisa felt her shoulders relax, her mind clear of the doubts and fears that had been plaguing her.

But little did she know, Dr. Sheldon was not one to give up easily. He seemed determined to push her boundaries, to test her patience and professionalism. And Aubery, despite his calm exterior, was not as oblivious as Lisa thought. He had noticed the subtle changes in her behaviour, the way she seemed to tense up whenever Dr. Sheldon's name was mentioned.

As they walked, Aubery's eyes lingered on Lisa's face, his mind working overtime to piece together the puzzle. He knew that something was bothering her, and he was determined to find out what it was.

The days turning into weeks, Lisa's interactions with Dr. Sheldon became increasingly strained.

She would feel a knot in her stomach every time he walked into the room, his presence making her skin crawl. Despite her best efforts to maintain a professional demeanour, she couldn't shake off the feeling that Dr. Sheldon was watching her, his eyes lingering on her in a way that made her feel uneasy.

The tension was palpable, and Lisa's anxiety levels skyrocketed. She would find herself glancing over her

shoulder, wondering when Dr. Sheldon would appear next. She started to dread coming to work, feeling like she was walking into a minefield, never knowing when Dr. Sheldon's behavior would escalate.

Aubery, sensing that something was wrong, would often ask Lisa if everything was okay. But she would brush it off, not wanting to burden him with her concerns. She felt like she was carrying this weight alone, unsure of how to navigate this situation without causing any damage to her relationship with Aubery.

One day, as Lisa was working late, Dr. Sheldon appeared at her desk, his smile seeming more like a smirk.

"Lisa, I need to discuss some...urgent matters with you," he said, his voice low and serious.

Lisa's heart sank, her mind racing with worst-case scenarios. She tried to stay calm, but her hands were shaking as she gathered her papers.

"What is it, Dr. Sheldon?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

Dr. Sheldon's eyes locked onto hers, and for a moment, Lisa felt like she was trapped.

"I think we need to talk about...your role in the project," he said, his voice dripping with an intensity that made Lisa's skin prickle.

Lisa's instincts screamed at her to get out of there, to escape the suffocating atmosphere that Dr. Sheldon seemed to create around her. But she was frozen in place, unsure of how to react.

As Dr. Sheldon leaned in closer, his breath whispering against her ear, Lisa felt a chill run down her spine. She knew she had to get away, but her legs seemed rooted to the spot.

And then, just as suddenly as he appeared, Dr. Sheldon was gone, leaving Lisa feeling shaken and vulnerable. She took a deep breath, trying to calm her racing heart, but the unease lingered, refusing to dissipate.

As she packed up her things and headed home, Lisa couldn't shake off the feeling that she was being watched. She quickened her pace, her senses on high alert, wondering if Dr. Sheldon was still lurking in the shadows, waiting for his next move.

When she finally saw Aubery, she felt a wave of relief wash over her. His warm smile and gentle eyes were a balm to her frazzled nerves, and for a moment, she forgot about the tension and unease that Dr. Sheldon had created.

But as she looked into Aubery's eyes, Lisa knew that she couldn't keep this charade going forever. She had to find a way to deal with Dr. Sheldon, to put an end to this

toxic dynamic that was threatening to destroy her sense of peace.

Lisa's heart had been thudding in her chest all morning, as though trying to warn her of something she wasn't ready to admit. Dr. Sheldon's interactions with her had grown unnervingly close—too close. At first, she had told herself it was just professional courtesy, his way of being attentive. But lately, the way his eyes lingered a second too long, the way his tone dipped into a murmur that felt uncomfortably personal, made her skin crawl.

Unable to bear the eerie tension alone, Lisa made up her mind: she had to confide in Aubery. If there was anyone whose judgment she trusted, it was him. She rehearsed the words in her head as she hurried through the dim corridor—the admission of Sheldon's unnerving behaviour, the trembling confession of her fear.

But just as she rounded the corner to Aubery's office, her steps froze. The air seemed to turn heavier. Her gaze fixed on the sight before her, and within seconds her breath caught. There, through the glass pane, she saw them—Aubery and Dr. Sheldon—together.

They weren't just passing words like acquaintances. They were talking intently, leaning toward each other, voices low, secretive. Lisa's stomach clenched. Her eyes widened, betraying every ounce of shock crashing through her. She couldn't make sense of it. Why was

Aubery—her confidant, her safe space—standing side by side with the very man who made her feel hunted?

Her throat dried; no sound came when she tried to speak. She pressed a trembling hand to the wall for support. The words she had planned to say to Aubery scattered like broken glass in her mind.

Unease washed over her in suffocating waves. Should she walk away? Should she confront them? The realization hit her like a jolt of lightning—she didn't know who she could trust anymore. The sight of the two men together twisted her insides with dread.

For the first time, Lisa wondered if she was walking into a deeper web of secrets than she had ever imagined.

Lisa's steps quivered as she forced herself forward. Enough hiding. She could no longer suffocate under the weight of fear. If Aubery truly love her, if she could trust anyone, it had to be him. She inhaled sharply, wiped her clammy palms on her skirt, and walked toward the corner where their voices carried in hushed but rigid tones.

The air thickened the closer she drew. Her pulse hammered in her ears, drowning out everything for a heartbeat—until she caught the words. Aubery's voice, firm and cutting, yet fiercely protective:

"Don't ever come near Lisa. This is what I wanted to tell you. She's not the type you're thinking. Why you

approached her, and what business you think you have with her, I can't understand".

"For your information, she's an Executive Assistant working for the Director—nothing to do with your projects or talks. She only attends those meetings to take notes. That's it. And one more time—if I see you in her office or calling her—I'll raise a complaint against you."

Lisa froze in place. His words sank deep into her—each syllable a shield forged for her sake. Her chest constricted, and before she realized, her vision blurred. Tears brimmed and slipped down her cheeks, unstoppable. She pressed herself against the wall, trying to silence her sobs. She had come here ready to reveal her fears. Instead, she found Aubery already fighting for her.

But fate is cruel with timing. Dr. Sheldon shifted suddenly, his gaze flicking past Aubery and locking onto the faint movement—the glimmer of her figure.

A slow, deliberate smirk curved his lips, and his voice rose, poisoned with calculated malice.

"Lisa and I... we're in a relationship."

The words detonated in the air. Lisa flinched as if struck. Aubery stiffened, his breath catching. Dr. Sheldon continued; his tone smooth, insidious, lethal:

“That’s why we meet daily. You may be her friend, Aubery, but there are things she hasn’t told you. We wanted to keep it secret.”

Lisa’s tears faltered into shocked silence. Her lips parted to speak, defend, deny—but nothing came. Her throat locked. Her hands trembled violently at her sides.

The words sliced through Aubery like shards of glass. He turned sharply toward Lisa—eyes wide, searching, begging silently for her to deny it. But her silence was deafening. Her tears looked like confession.

Aubery’s chest contracted, a hollow ache cracking through him. He knew Lisa was hiding something, struggling with an unspoken torment. He had always sensed her fear, her unease.

But love?

A secret relationship with Sheldon?

His heart recoiled at the thought, but the possibility clawed at him.

All the fire—the resolve to protect her, to stand against Sheldon—faltered into confusion and pain.

Lisa hugged herself tightly, her sobs muffled now, her whole-body trembling in shadow. She wanted to scream the truth, to beg Aubery not to believe.

But fear—cold, paralyzing fear—kept her rooted. If she spoke now, Sheldon might twist it further, and Aubery might never trust her again.

Her secret wasn't love. It was terror.

And yet, in Aubery's wounded, disbelieving eyes... it already looked too late.

Aubery's lips parted, his voice trembling at the edge of release, ready to push out his anguish, his confusion, his protest—when suddenly, Lisa lifted her hand, stopping him with a small gesture.

A silence hung heavy. With footsteps deliberate, she closed the distance between herself and Dr. Sheldon.

Her body trembled, but her face—oh, her face carried a transformation Aubery had never seen.

She turned her gaze toward him briefly, a smile twitching on her lips.

It wasn't warmth. It wasn't comfort.

It was dreadful.

Twisted.

A smile that bled denial, heavy with an aura that unsettled Aubery's very core. A smile meant to cut him open, to strip him of his last defenses. In that instant, it felt less like an expression and more like a dagger twisted silently in his heart.

Lisa's voice broke the silence, cool and sharp, echoing through the narrow hallway.

"Yes," she said firmly.

"We kept it secret until now. We're in love."

The floor seemed to fall out beneath Aubery. His eyes widened, turning bloodshot, the sting of betrayal flooding him like acid.

That smile—those words—he had hoped against, hoped she would deny Sheldon, that she would finally free herself by speaking of their bond, of the unspoken love between them.

But instead, she had confirmed the cruelest lie of all.

His chest felt hollow, every breath searing like fire. His heart had already cracked—but this shattered it entirely.

As though struck down, Aubery staggered back a step. His last fragile hope dissolved into a mist of despair.

Unable to endure another second of this torment, he willed his legs to turn him away.

His body screamed for escape—to vanish into shadows, away from the two people now joined in his heartbreak.

And then—

Crack!!!!...

The sound tore through the corridor like thunder—raw, sharp, merciless. Aubery's head snapped back instantly. His eyes widened, realizing what had happened.

Lisa's hand lingered, mid-air, still trembling from the force of the slap. Dr. Sheldon's cheek was flushed red, his composure cracked by the ferocity of her strike. He stood frozen; disbelief painted across his face.

Lisa's voice erupted, fierce, untamed, her words a blade slicing through deception:

"Yes, Aubery and I are in love!"

she shouted, every syllable shaking with both anger and release.

Her chest rose and fell rapidly, her hands clenched into fists.

"You came in between, meddling with my life, poisoning it with your lies. I don't care who you are or what power you think you have—but what you said isn't true. And if you dare not clear up this misunderstanding, Dr. Sheldon..."

Her voice dropped into a deadly whisper, laced with fire.

"...I will never let you go from this peacefully."

The words reverberated in the stunned silence of the hall.

Aubery stood still, his body frozen, his heart pounding harder than ever before. Shock mingled with confusion. The smile. The lie. The slap. The confession. It all spiraled before him too fast to grasp.

But one thing was undeniable—Lisa had chosen, in the most brutal and startling way possible, to destroy Sheldon's façade and proclaim her truth.

And yet, Aubery's heart, still raw and bleeding, wondered: did she mean those words? Or was she only surviving—caught between truth, fear, and desperate love?

After Lisa's slap, Dr. Sheldon's face twisted with rage, his pride scorched by her blatant defiance. He lunged, his arm raised threateningly, intent on restoring his bruised ego with violence.

But before his hand could fall, a firm grip immobilized his wrist—Aubery's presence, rock-solid, intervening with unyielding strength.

Dr. Sheldon's eyes widened, shock eclipsing his anger. He had imagined his words would shatter Aubery and drive him away, granting free access to Lisa's life and mind.

Instead, he found himself powerless, outmanoeuvred not only by Lisa's courage, but by the depth of her and Aubery's love—something he couldn't begin to understand.

Their struggles to remain together had forged a bond stronger than any scheme or manipulation he could muster.

Aubery stepped in front of Lisa, shielding her, fingers intertwining with hers in a silent but steady affirmation of support. His eyes met Dr. Sheldon's, resolute and blazing with conviction.

"Dr. Sheldon,"

Aubery said, his voice low and steel-edged,

"you may think lightly of me, but you don't know us at all.

If I ever see you here again, I can't guarantee you'll leave unscathed. Don't ever dare to come near Lisa—not even for work."

Lisa's eyes shimmered with tears, relief and love tangled with haunting embers of fear. Dr. Sheldon recoiled, exposed and defeated, the bitter truth finally sinking in.

No intimidation or deception could break what Lisa and Aubery had built through sacrifice and resilience.

In the charged silence that followed, the hallway became more than a battleground—it was proof that even in the face of adversity, love and courage would prevail.

Dr. Sheldon couldn't bear the burning stares of those gathering nearby. The echo of Lisa's slap lingered

heavy in the air, imprinting humiliation on every stride as he turned and walked away, his pride wounded far deeper than he'd ever imagined.

Aubery and Lisa, united now in their pain and solidarity, slipped out into the sunlight—a world away from the shadowed corridor where everything had unravelled.

Lisa led Aubery, almost pulling, to the comfort of their favorite coffee shop. Familiar scents of espresso and cinnamon hung in the air—sanctuary from the chaos.

she had set out that day only to share the truth with Aubery, but fate had intervened, putting her face-to-face not just with him, but with Sheldon in the most volatile moment.

She ordered water for them both, hands still trembling, the glass cold against her palms, grounding her as she tried to find her words.

They sat tucked in a corner, Aubery's gaze heavy with confusion and lingering heartbreak. For a moment neither spoke, only the muffled hum of life beyond their small world. He broke the silence, voice raw with pain:

“Why didn't you tell me any of this before? Why did you have to hide it? Why now?” searching her eyes for answers.

Lisa closed her eyes, fighting tears, squeezed his hand, voice trembling but steady desperate to reassure him.

“I thought maybe... maybe it was just me. That I was being paranoid, imagining things that weren’t there. I kept hoping I was wrong—that people weren’t as cruel as the thoughts running through my head.”

Her voice broke, then gathered strength.

“But when things got worse, I felt lost. I didn’t know how to face it alone anymore. I wanted to tell you everything today— Her gaze dropped, recalling Sheldon’s persistence, but Sheldon stopped me, trying to lure me into out-of-work conversations, asking about movies, food, anything but my job.”

Aubery’s jaw tightened, protective anger flickering behind his eyes. Lisa reached for his hand, fingers entwining—a trembling plea for understanding.

“I told him I wasn’t free, that I had a boyfriend, that I loved you. That didn’t stop him—he just kept asking questions about you, I told him about you. Right after that, I found you both together in the hallway. That’s how I found you both together, and... everything exploded.”

Their hands remained linked, a fragile touch binding them across all the days of silence, doubt, and secret longing. Aubery closed his eyes, exhaling—relief

and love mingling with sadness at all they'd been through just to speak the truth aloud.

The world outside went on—cars passing, voices rising and falling, ordinary life marching forward—unaware of the small, courageous battles fought in coffee shop corners.

And in that moment, filled with honest emotion and shared vulnerability, marked the beginning of healing for them both.

Lisa and Aubery learned that love might not shield them from pain, but together, it would carry them through it. proof that facing fears together could finally bring true relief.

Aubery sat quietly, letting, Lisa's words tumbling through his mind—the confessions, the hesitation, the raw honesty that set her apart from the world —each answer a thread in the tapestry of her truth. Doubt lingered, shadows of hurt distorting his view, but another part of him—a deeper, truer part—recalled her resilience, her quiet dignity, the way she'd always forgone easy answers for what felt right, Lisa's sincerity cut through the confusion. He knew her well enough to trust her heart over fleeting appearances. Slowly, hope and belief in her honesty settled into his soul.

“Let's go somewhere,” Aubery whispered, his voice a bridge searching for her. “Just us.”

Yearning to restore what had fractured between them, they decided it was time to step away from the turmoil. The weekend offered an escape—an opportunity to silence the noise and let healing begin. Both took leave from work, eager for the respite that a journey together would provide.

The city faded behind them as they wound through open farmland and quiet villages, heading for a place where nobody else could lay claim to their shadows.

The car hummed along scenic roads; windows open to fresh air scented with promise. As miles slipped by, the tension dissolved, gradually replaced by laughter and warmth.

At a bend in the road, Aubery glanced over, searching her eyes. “You know, I haven’t told you much about my family,” he admitted, voice soft and vulnerable. “Or the things that shaped me.”

Lisa’s hand reached for his, squeezing with reassurance. “I want to know everything. The good. The hurt. Even the stories that haunt us.”

The hours brimmed with stories only lovers share—childhood triumphs and regrets, tales of relentless hope, fragile dreams once buried. Lisa spoke of her past friends, the loneliness she sometimes felt, and the small, secret wishes she’d harboured. Aubery confessed old failures, memories that weighed on his spirit, and precious moments he longed to relive.

Between the laughter and tears, the distance between them shrank, and with each confession, trust blossomed anew. Beneath a dusky twilight, when words finally ran out and only silence remained, Aubery reached for Lisa, touching her cheek—a gentle promise that whatever storm awaited, he'd stand beside her.

The road they travelled was more than asphalt—it was the fragile path back to one another, paved by vulnerability and choice. And as the world spun quietly beyond their windows, Lisa and Aubery discovered what forgiveness and love could truly mean.

The day's exploration had left them breathless—not just from the windswept hills and sprawling fields, but from a deep, quiet joy neither had felt in a long time.

As the sun dipped low behind the distant trees, Lisa and Aubery returned to their cozy countryside retreat, their footsteps slow, hearts lighter.

Inside the warm kitchen, the promise of a simple meal awaited—one that held more meaning than just food.

Lisa's mind wandered to the memories tied to these moments. Growing up, she had been the family's cherished daughter, her every whim attended to by doting hands.

Whether it was the gleam of polished floors or the delicate linen on the table, her mother or maid handled it all effortlessly.

Her father, gentle and protective, insisted she focus on her dreams rather than house chores, shielding her from the mundane.

Yet, her mother, persistent and wise in her own way, insisted Lisa learn the basics—small skills that meant more than housekeeping.

But stubbornness had been her shield; she had always resisted. For years, as the eldest child, she carried the emotional weight of responsibility for her family's happiness and well-being.

She was fierce, protective, capable—but she had never learned how to lay a proper dining table or stir a pot on the stove.

Then came Aubery, quietly shifting the rhythm of her life. With his gentle patience and warm encouragement, he had opened a new world of simple gestures—the small acts of love woven into everyday life.

Earlier this trip, she'd surprised herself by chopping vegetables with care, learning to balance flavors she'd never dared try. His quiet smile had beckoned her to try more, to embrace these new roles not as chores, but as acts of affection.

Lost in thought, Lisa was startled by Aubery's voice floating softly behind her.

"Hey, are you alright?" he called, a tender note of amusement in his tone.

She turned, cheeks warm with a shy smile, grateful for this man who was teaching her that strength could be gentle—and love could be found in every little moment shared.

Aubery's eyes sparkled with playful encouragement as he watched Lisa hesitate near the stove.

"Come on, I'll help you," he said gently, stepping closer and wrapping his hand lightly around hers.

His touch was steady, reassuring, grounding her in ways words never could.

They moved together, a quiet dance of laughter and shared glances.

As Lisa fumbled with the cutting board—chopping vegetables unevenly—Aubery couldn't help but chuckle softly.

She looked up, cheeks flushed, a mix of embarrassment and determination lighting her eyes.

"It's okay," Aubery murmured warmly.

"No one's expecting a chef. It's the effort that matters."

Lisa's smile grew, softening the barriers she'd long held around herself. She realized these small moments, so ordinary at first glance, were weaving threads of trust and tenderness between them.

The kitchen filled with the aroma of simmering spices and quiet conversation, a sanctuary from the world's heaviness.

While stirring the pot, Lisa glanced up at Aubery and found him watching her with a gentle admiration that made her heart flutter.

She felt seen—not just her strengths, but her vulnerabilities, the imperfections and all.

They set the dining table together, Aubery patiently explaining the placement of each plate and fork. Lisa listened intently, absorbing every detail as if uncovering a secret language meant only for them.

When finally, they sat down to eat, the meal was simple but rich with new meaning—a celebration of their journey, the barriers falling away, and the love quietly growing in every shared smile and touch.

As they settled down at the small wooden table, the soft glow of candlelight flickering between them, Aubery reached across and gently took Lisa's hand.

The meal lay before them—not extravagant, but crafted with a tenderness that made each bite a testament to their fragile healing.

Aubery's voice broke the comfortable silence first.

"I never realized how little I knew about the parts of you behind the strong, capable woman everyone sees."

Lisa squeezed his hand, eyes sparkling with a mix of gratitude and vulnerability.

"I guess I had to be strong for a long time. For my family. For myself. But with you, I'm learning it's okay to lean, to be fragile too."

He nodded thoughtfully.

"That takes courage. I want to be there for all of it—the strength and the vulnerability."

A soft smile curved Lisa's lip.

"Remember how I told you about not knowing how to set the table?"

He laughed quietly. "Yeah, I'm glad you're mastering the art now."

Her laugh joined his, lightening the space between them.

"It's silly, but these small things mean a lot. It's not just about cooking or setting a table—it's about sharing a life, building something together."

Aubery's gaze grew tender, his thumb brushing over her hand.

"Then let's keep building. Together."

The words hung in the air like a promise, binding them in this quiet evening, away from the shadows and fears that had clouded their past. For the first time in a long while, hope felt real, and love felt possible.

In those moments, surrounded by flickering candlelight and the soft hum of evening, Lisa understood that love wasn't just in grand declarations but in these small, everyday acts—learning, trying, and simply being together.

The warmth of their shared meal lingered, settling comfortably between them like a gentle embrace. The veil of vulnerability that had hung over them all day was now an unspoken current, pulling their souls closer in a way words could never capture.

The soft glow of the room wrapped around them as they slipped away from the world outside, their shadows merging together on the walls. The air was thick with everything left unsaid, the delicate tension swelling between their skin and breaths.

Aubery's hand, soft and deliberate, brushed a stray lock of hair behind Lisa's ear. The simple touch sent a ripple of heat blossoming through her skin, her cheeks blooming with a delicate flush. Her breath caught, fragile and sweet, a silent surrender that spoke volumes.

His fingers traced slowly from her cheek down the curve of her neck, lingering as the room seemed to close around them. As his hand rested lightly on her waist, a

quiet fire sparked within her—an urgent ache that words failed to hold. The years of longing, frustration, and secret hope pressed upon them both, urging their hearts to speak in the language of touch.

Leaning in, Aubery's lips found hers in a kiss gentle enough to be a promise, yet deepened with a trace of fierce hunger as he softly bit her bottom lip. The tender pain mingled with desire, breaking down the remaining walls between them.

The warmth of his arms encircling her drew them inexorably closer. The hug was a silent declaration, a movement forward on a path long awaited—a joining of two souls quietly craving the same refuge.

The embrace tightened, bodies pressing together with a need that defied time and fear. Clothes whispered to the floor as they explored each other's warmth, learning the contours and secrets held beneath soft skin and racing hearts.

In that moment, the space between them vanished, replaced by the perfect fusion of yearning and belonging.

Their movements were careful, almost reverent—an intimate dance of discovery and trust. Fingers tangled in hair, skin kissed and murmured over, each touch a vow. The world beyond their room faded into silence, leaving only the two of them entwined in a moment sacred and fierce.

The air between them thickened with a tender urgency, but before the moment deepened, Aubery paused, searching Lisa's eyes as if to ask the question his lips held back. His voice was a soft murmur, careful and full of reverence:

"Are you sure? Only if you want to."

Lisa's breath hitched, not from hesitation but because in his simple question she felt her worth, her voice invited and honored.

She smiled, a gentle nod punctuating her certainty.

"Yes," she whispered.

"I want this—Only with you."

"That means more than you know," Aubery murmured, his hand cupping her cheek with tender reverence.

"If at any moment you want to stop or slow down, I want you to tell me. No pressure, no hesitation—only what feels right for you."

She nodded, a joyful smile spreading, the silence between them humming with unspoken agreements. Every touch that followed was cautious, deliberate—each connection a question, each sigh an enthusiastic answer.

Their movements slowed deliberately, each touch a question and an answer. Aubery traced the curve of her

jaw and waited, fingers unsure, seeking her silent permission.

When Aubery's lips brushed hers, he pulled back slightly, whispering, "Is this okay? Do you want me to keep going?"

Lisa returned his gaze, a flicker of vulnerability shining beneath her strength. She leaned closer and whispered, "Please."

They explored not only each other's bodies but the depths of their readiness, each moment built on mutual joy.

Whenever doubt fluttered near, Aubery's hands found hers, grounding her. When Lisa hesitated, Aubery kissed her softly and asked, "Is this okay?"

Consent was their quiet rhythm—steady, ongoing, and alive—a sacred dance in which both led and followed, building a sanctuary where love could breathe without fear.

In the warm hush of the night, their love was more than skin deep—it was a celebration of freedom, trust, and a heartfelt, passionate yes.

The words hung between them, a feast of trust and desire entwined. Every kiss, every touch, every sigh was a shared dance—given and received freely, woven with care and respect.

Their movements were not just physical, but an ongoing conversation—one of respect, trust, and enthusiastic desire.

In the glow of the night, they discovered that giving and receiving, asking and answering, was more than necessary. It was beautiful. It was connection.

And in that sacred exchange, two souls found home.

When their hearts finally slowed, they lay tangled in quiet warmth, words unnecessary as their fingers wove stories of reassurance and love on bare skin. The night held its breath around them, cradling the fragile new beginning blossoming in the hush of shared sighs and gentle kisses.

The soft light of dawn filtered through the curtains, casting a gentle glow around the room where they lay tangled beneath the covers.

Lisa stirred first, her fingers tracing the gentle rise and fall of Aubery's chest. The quiet rhythm was a comforting song, a reassuring promise after the night they had shared.

Aubery's eyes fluttered open, meeting hers with a sleepy, tender smile.

"Good morning," he whispered, his voice thick with warmth and awe.

Lisa smiled back, her heart still fluttering.

“Morning,” she replied softly.

“Last night... it meant everything to me.”

He brushed a stray curl from her face, his touch feather-light.

“It was perfect because it was with you. Every moment felt like a new promise.”

She leaned closer, her lips brushing his in a delicate kiss.

“I never thought I could feel this safe... this seen.”

“You’ve always deserved that. And I want to be the one who gives it to you,” Aubery said sincerely.

Pulling her close, he let his fingers trace invisible patterns on her back, grounding them both in the present.

Lisa sighed, content and wrapped in the warm cocoon they had woven together.

“It’s like waking up to a second chance.”

Aubery smiled, the light in his eyes shining brighter than the morning sun.

“Then let’s make every morning feel like this—full of hope, calm, and love.”

Their fingers entwined once again, hearts speaking the silent language of connection—knowing this was only the beginning of a beautiful journey together.

The morning light spilled softly through the windows as Lisa moved around the kitchen with quiet care.

She prepared a simple but loving breakfast for Aubery, each gesture infused with a tender love that bloomed from the night before—a warm plate of spiced roasted chana sautéed with fresh tomatoes and fragrant coriander, paired with toasted whole-grain bread and a steaming cup of coffee.

Aubery watched her with a warmth that made his heart swell. He took a bite, savoring the simple meal and the extraordinary woman who made it.

His voice grew soft but earnest as he reached for her hand.

“Lisa, last night and this morning—everything feels new, like I’m finally seeing you in a way I never did before. I want to be here for you, completely.”

She smiled, her fingers lacing with his.

“I feel the same. It’s like we’re rebuilding not just us, but a safe place where we can both be ourselves.”

After the comforting meal and heartfelt conversation, they decided to venture out for a little shopping, eager to enjoy the day together and create more memories.

Hand in hand, they strolled down the bustling street, the city buzzing with life around them.

Suddenly, a voice interrupted their easy rhythm—bright, familiar, and laced with surprise.

“Hi, Aubery!”

How are you? I didn’t know you were here!”

A woman stepped forward, her eyes locking onto Aubery as if the world held no one else. Her tone carried a possessive edge, her smile too wide, too knowing.

Lisa’s steps slowed, her hand tightening on Aubery’s arm as the woman’s voice rang out—a deliberate greeting that seemed to erase Lisa’s presence from the scene, the unspoken challenge hanging between them.

For a heartbeat, Lisa felt an old ache—a prickly feeling of being invisible, her excitement for the day deflating. She took a slow breath, summoning her calm, and offered Aubery a supportive smile, determined not to let this surprise ruin their mood.

Aubery’s posture stiffened, but the warmth in his eyes quickly found Lisa’s.

He glanced at Lisa, silently signaling that he was aware—and the day’s unfolding was about to take a new turn.

The woman continued; her gaze fixed on Aubery as she spoke with a confidence that bordered on intrusion.

Lisa kept her posture steady at Aubery's side, but inside, a whirlwind churned.

She had felt invisible before—easy to overlook, easy for someone else to command the spotlight.

Was it happening again?

The woman's directness stung, stirring up old anxieties Lisa thought she'd left behind. Lisa let herself breathe, leaning into Aubery's side, quietly promising to hold onto that truth.

She clenched Aubery's hand a touch tighter, silently grateful for his warmth.

Why is it so easy for others to erase me? she wondered.

Is Aubery noticing how this makes me feel?

Will I always need to fight for my place?

Aubery sensed her unease and responded with tenderness. He reached for Lisa's hand and, not letting go, smiled at the newcomer.

"Hello," he replied, his tone friendly but firm.

"I'm doing well, thank you. Lisa and I are spending the day together—just exploring, nothing planned."

Aubery's gentle squeeze and calm reply reminded her of the changes between them—how much effort he

was making to center her, to show openly she belonged with him.

He's choosing me, she reassured herself, feeling the old doubts begin to soften.

I'm not secondary. I'm not in the background. I matter—to him and to myself.

Even when the world tried to interrupt, she refused to let herself fade away.

The words hung between them, making Lisa feel seen, cherished, and protected. The stranger's smile faltered for a moment, her eyes flickering with curiosity before she managed a polite nod. Aubery's arm slipped around Lisa's waist, pulling her closer.

Lisa found her confidence returning, the insecurities of the moment melting away as she leaned into Aubery's side.

Together, they faced the unexpected with quiet strength—their bond unshaken by interruption, and their day ready to begin again.

Returning from their restorative trip, Lisa and Aubery were lighter, their laughter genuine and easy. The countryside had swept old shadows away and returned them to familiar streets with hearts uncluttered, ready for gentle days ahead.

That evening, Lisa lingered at home, absorbing her family's warmth. The living room was alive with chatter and the scent of chai, and she let herself fade into the comfort, her burdens held softly by those who knew her best.

After everything, she knew she needed this: the embrace of home, stolen time, and sleep free from worry's grip.

She composed a polite message to Mrs. Kaira, speaking of illness and her wish for two more days' leave.

Afterwards, she texted Aubery: she would be away from the office, taking precious time to rest.

Aubery's reply was immediate and understanding:

"Rest. Sleep. Enjoy being with your family. You deserve every bit of it."

It felt like permission she hadn't known she needed—a message of care she could finally accept.

Lisa settled into her bed, surrendering to sleep. Her face softened into a peaceful calm, her troubles dissolving as she slipped into dreams. For the first time in ages, she slept as soundly as a child—unburdened, protected, and content.

Meanwhile, Aubery sat at his lab desk surrounded by scattered notes and glowing monitors, feeling the crunch of unexpected responsibilities. With Veronica,

the senior scientist, distant and distracted by her own family troubles, much of the workload had fallen to him.

As a junior scientist, Aubery knew the routine, but today felt particularly heavy—his hands moving quickly as he compiled data, checked results, and drafted his notes.

He was suddenly the linchpin for every hurried experiment, every note and sample. The rhythm of pipettes and code was relentless, yet beneath it Aubery found a curious energy; his connection to Lisa gave the day new meaning.

He worked, not just for discovery, but for someone waiting for him beyond the world of fluorescence and equations.

Their lives now ran briefly in parallel—Lisa in the gentle embrace of home and sleep, Aubery in the charged hum of scientific pursuit.

Aubery's day had been a relentless marathon. Twelve agonizing hours in the lab, bearing the weight of eight people's work alone while Lisa's absence left a silent void. Sleep had become a stranger, his eyes stinging with exhaustion, ribs tight from hunger—breakfast and lunch swallowed by the urgency to keep projects alive. He managed, of course. He always did.

But today, the walls felt like they were closing in, the pressure suffocating, and the hours stretching endlessly before him like an unforgiving shadow.

Meanwhile, Lisa woke slowly, wrapped in the softness of sleep she hadn't felt in weeks. She stretched; mind blissfully unburdened as sunlight filtered through the curtains. The peaceful rest had refreshed her, filling her with a quiet strength she hadn't known she needed.

Ready—no, determined—to face whatever challenges life now threw her way.

She picked up her phone with a smile and typed:

Hey Darlo!!

What you're doing??

Where are you???

Did you reach your room??

Minutes ticked by. No reply.

A flutter of unease stirred, but she dismissed it, telling herself he must be busy.

Hours passed. Desperation seeped into her heart as she called again—calls unanswered, unreachable.

Her mind, once calm and hopeful, began to spiral into doubt.

Is he talking to someone else?

But he wouldn't ignore my calls if he was... right?

Or maybe he's out somewhere, with someone else—a girl?

Chills crawled down her spine, cold and unwelcome. Her worst fears twisted in tight coils, choking her trust. She breathlessly dialed once more.

The phone abruptly clicked—then his rapid, tense voice:

“Hello? Aubery here.”

“Hello, Aubery? It’s me.

What have you been doing that you can’t even see my name?” Lisa’s voice trembled with rising panic.

“I’m dealing with something important. Still at the lab—don’t call. Bye.”

The line went dead—cut off without a word more, without listening to her.

Lisa’s chest tightened, a restless storm raging within. She hated these creeping doubts—hated how her mind painted fearsome scenarios where none belonged. But the silence screamed louder than reason.

She took a shaky breath and made a decision—one born of love and anxious need:

I have to see him. I need to see him.

With trembling fingers, she grabbed her coat and headed out into the afternoon, every step heavy with hope and dread tangled tightly inside her.

The door to the lab creaked open, and Lisa stepped inside, the sterile scent of chemicals and buzzing machines washing over her. Her footsteps echoed quietly against the cool floor as she scanned the room—rows of microscopes, lab tables strewn with glass slides and notebooks, but not a hint of Aubery.

Her heart clenched, uncertainty tightening its grip. She spotted him in the far corner, hunched over a terminal, eyes bloodshot, rubbing one weary temple with a shaking hand. The weight of his exhaustion pressed down like a physical force.

“Aubery?” Her voice was soft but steady, carrying across the room.

He looked up sharply, startled as if pulled from a distant world. The fatigue etched into his face deepened, but there was a flicker of relief in his eyes when he saw her.

Lisa took a hesitant step forward, swallowing the swirl of emotions inside her.

“I was worried,” she admitted quietly.

“You didn’t answer my calls or texts. I just... I needed to see you. To know you’re okay.”

He sighed, finally lifting his hands away from the keyboard, running a hand through his tangled hair.

“It’s been hell today. Veronica’s family issues mean I’m shouldering nearly everything. I haven’t eaten properly. I’m sleep-deprived, and honestly, I’m not sure how I made it through.”

Lisa’s gaze softened, determination blooming in her.

She crossed the distance quickly, reaching out to clasp his hands in hers.

“You don’t have to do this alone.”

His jaw tightened, vulnerability slipping through.

“I know. But it’s my responsibility. I don’t want to let anyone down.”

“You’re not alone anymore,” Lisa said firmly.

“We’ll figure this out together. But you have to promise me—promise me you’ll take care of yourself, too.”

He met her eyes, the raw honesty breaking through his tired defenses. He nodded slowly, a fragile gratitude shining through.

Lisa moved swiftly through the lab, her fingers skimming over the keyboard as she compiled rows of complex data. She wasn’t an expert, but she was quick—absorbing instructions and executing tasks with an energy that surprised both of them.

In three hours, she had scaled the mountain of work meant for four colleagues, juggling spreadsheets and

notes so Aubery could focus on calibrating instruments, preparing reagents, and separating samples.

The rhythm they created was effortless, a silent language of mutual support filling the sterile space.

At last, the work was done, and the day's looming pressure eased. The lab hummed with quiet relief as they sat side by side, the glow from the monitors haloing their faces.

Lisa broke the silence, concern etching her voice.

"Why did you feel you had to do everything alone?" she asked gently.

"You could have asked someone for help. Or shared something I could've handled from home."

Aubery lowered his gaze, the truth hanging heavy between them.

She pressed on: "Why didn't you tell me you were struggling? Am I not trustworthy enough—someone you could share these things with?"

He hesitated, rubbing at the fatigue lined beneath his eyes. Her words pierced him not with accusation, but with longing—a desire to be let in, trusted, relied upon.

Aubery looked up, vulnerability softening his features.

"It's not that I don't trust you," he murmured, voice rough.

“Sometimes I get caught up in wanting to shoulder everything myself. I don’t want to burden you with my work—especially after all you’ve been through.”

Lisa’s hand found his, squeezing gently.

“You’re not giving me burden, Aubery. We’re a team—we promised to face things together. Let me help. Lean on me, like I lean on you.”

Relief flickered across his tired face, the boundaries between them quietly dissolving. In that dim lab, they discovered again how trust isn’t given once, but nurtured every day—through shared struggles, honest words, and the comfort of knowing they weren’t alone.

After the long day in the lab, Aubery and Lisa stepped out into the cool night air, letting the gentle breeze soothe away the fatigue clinging to their skin. The city had long since surrendered to nightfall, weaving silvery shadows through the narrow streets.

The restaurant’s warm lights welcomed them, but exhaustion draped Aubery’s shoulders, and he barely touched his food. Lisa, attentive and caring, coaxed him to eat, her words half-teasing and half-worried, wanting to nourish him in every way she knew. He smiled weakly, grateful for her insistence, and finished his meal.

After dinner, the drive home was quiet, their fingers brushing together atop the gearshift. Aubery’s gaze

drifted, heavy-lidded; his spirit tired beyond words. Lisa watched him, her heart aching at the strain in his smile.

"I'll be fine," Aubery managed as they reached his doorstep, but Lisa's eyes held the kind of resolve that only love gives.

As he disappeared into his room, the thought of his headache and that lingering fatigue gnawed at her. Unwilling to let him drift alone through his struggle, she stopped at the pharmacy for medicine, compassion guiding her every step.

Back at his door, she let herself in quietly, the hush of sleep cocooning Aubery as he lay curled beneath a thin blanket. His face, softened by sleep, reminded her of the tender boy she'd fallen for—the sharp angles of stress melted away, leaving behind only innocence and trust. She didn't want to disturb the precious rest he so desperately needed.

Lisa hesitated, medicine cradled in her hand, then set it gently at the bedside. She knelt by him, her fingers working through the tousled hair and tense muscles, each gentle touch an unspoken promise to stay.

She massaged his temples and shoulders, feeling the knots loosen, feeling his breath slow into peaceful rhythm. The day's burdens seemed to slip away beneath her steady hands. Finally, she settled beside him, exhaustion claiming her with the comfort of being close.

Later, Aubery stirred. Through hazy moonlight he saw Lisa, her arm draped protectively across his chest, her hair spilling over the pillow, her lips parted in restful sleep. In those quiet moments he traced the curve of her brow, the faint worry still lingering even in dreams, and he realized with a rush how deeply she cared.

He tucked the blanket gently around her and lay back, letting memories of all their stolen moments fill his thoughts: her laughter, her stubbornness, the fearless way she worried for him. His heart bloomed with gratitude, and as sleep reclaimed him, he knew he was not alone—he was loved, guarded by the woman whose own battles had taught her how fiercely she could protect someone else.

For a night, the world had faded to quiet, and in its hush, love kept watch.

The next day, morning sun cast a warm glow over the office building as Lisa and Aubery headed to their respective departments. Aubery walked into his lab, a space filled with the hum of equipment and the scent of experiments in progress. The lab was his sanctuary, where he could lose himself in the intricacies of his work.

Just as he began to settle into his routine, Mrs. Kaira, their department head, appeared at the lab door. Her presence commanded attention, and Aubery's colleagues turned to greet her. Mrs. Kaira's eyes scanned

the room, her gaze lingering on Aubery before she smiled.

“Aubery, I wanted to speak with you about your recent work,” she said, her voice warm with appreciation.

“You’ve done an outstanding job, and I must say, I’m impressed.”

Aubery felt a surge of pride as Mrs. Kaira elaborated on his contributions. She mentioned specific projects and highlighted his innovative approach, which had garnered attention from higher-ups. Aubery listened intently, his confidence growing with each passing moment.

“I’m glad you’re doing well, Aubery,” Mrs. Kaira continued.

“I think it’s time you started preparing for you to become senior scientist. You’ve shown great potential in your work here.”

Aubery nodded, a smile spreading across his face. “I’ve actually been preparing for that, Mrs. Kaira, I have an exam to qualify for that which I applied in this week. Exam dates will be given soon.”

Mrs. Kaira’s expression turned even more approving.

“Excellent! You’re managing your academics alongside your work here. That’s commendable. Keep

going ahead with whatever you're planning. I'll be supporting you."

As Mrs. Kaira left the lab, Aubery's colleagues surrounded him, their faces filled with congratulations. They patted him on the back, and some even offered words of advice on how to balance his work and studies.

However, Aubery wasn't fooled. He knew that beneath the surface of their felicitations lay jealousy and envy. They were trying to sabotage him from behind the scenes.

Aubery didn't bother to engage with them on a deeper level. He knew their show of happiness wasn't entirely genuine. Instead, he decided to share his news with Lisa, with whom he can let his guard down. He headed to her cabin, eager to discuss his meeting with Mrs. Kaira.

As he waited outside Lisa's cabin, he overheard a heated conversation between Lisa and Mrs. Kaira. Aubery's curiosity got the better of him, and he listened in, his ears perked up.

"...I'm telling you, Mrs. Kaira, I did the work," Lisa said, her voice laced with frustration.

"Those people are trying to take credit for my efforts."

"I don't know, Lisa," Mrs. Kaira replied, her tone skeptical.

“You need to prove that the work is yours. Otherwise, I’ll have to consider their claims.”

Aubery’s eyes narrowed as he listened to the conversation. It seemed like Lisa was facing a challenge similar to the one he had just overcome.

He waited until Mrs. Kaira left Lisa’s cabin, stepping into a nearby room to avoid being seen.

Once Mrs. Kaira was gone, Aubery entered Lisa’s cabin.

“What happened?” he asked, concern etched on his face.

Lisa sighed, recounting the ordeal.

“When I was on leave, someone accessed my system and took the data I’d worked on. They showed it to Mrs. Kaira, saying it was their work.”

Aubery’s jaw tightened. “Who did this?”

Lisa shook her head.

“I don’t know for sure, but I had to explain everything to Mrs. Kaira – the projects, timelines, expenses, funds. She agreed the work was mine but said I was careless letting it get into others’ hands.”

Aubery listened intently, his support for Lisa unwavering.

“We’ll get through this,” he said firmly. “You’re not alone.”

As they discussed the situation, Aubery realized that the office politics were more complex than he had initially thought.

There were people who would stop at nothing to get ahead, even if it meant sabotaging others. But Aubery and Lisa were determined to rise above the intrigue and prove their worth.

The question was, who was behind the sabotage, and how far would they go to achieve their goals?

As Aubery and Lisa continued their discussion, Mrs. Kaira’s parting words still lingered in the air.

“Schedule meetings with the political people for a project discussion,” she had instructed Lisa.

Lisa nodded, taking note of the task.

“I’ll get right on it,” she said, her determination evident.

Aubery watched as Lisa efficiently began making arrangements for the meetings. Her professionalism and composure impressed him, especially considering the challenges she had just faced.

“You’re handling this really well,” Aubery said, offering his support.

“I’m here if you need any help.”

Lisa smiled, appreciating Aubery's words.

"Thanks, Aubery. I think I'll be okay. But I do need to figure out who accessed my system and took my work."

Aubery's expression turned serious. "We should investigate and gather evidence. Maybe there's a way to track who accessed your system."

Lisa's eyes lit up with determination.

"That's a great idea. Let's look into it."

Together, they began brainstorming ways to uncover the truth behind the sabotage. As they worked, Aubery realized that their office's seemingly tranquil facade hid a complex web of alliances and rivalries.

Aubery suggested Lisa to stop investigating to know who did this and prepare for the resubmission. The culprit will come out on their own.

Lisa decided to take Aubery's suggestion and resubmit her work to Mrs. Kaira, along with a detailed explanation of her ideology and approach. She poured her heart and soul into the submission, ensuring that every aspect of her work was clearly outlined.

When Mrs. Kaira reviewed Lisa's resubmission, she was impressed by the depth and clarity of her work. The explanation provided by Lisa showcased her expertise and dedication to the project.

Mrs. Kaira called Lisa to her office, and this time, her tone was more approving.

“Lisa, I’ve reviewed your work again, and I’m pleased to see that you’ve done an excellent job. Your ideology and approach are well thought out, and your work demonstrates a high level of expertise.”

Lisa felt a sense of relief and vindication.

“Thank you, Mrs. Kaira. I’m glad you appreciate my work.”

Mrs. Kaira nodded.

“Yes, Lisa, your work is good. However, I must reiterate the importance of keeping your work confidential. Don’t let others steal your ideas and credit. You’re capable of producing high-quality work, and I expect to see more of it in the future.”

Lisa nodded, taking Mrs. Kaira’s words to heart.

“I’ll be more careful next time, Mrs. Kaira. Thank you for your guidance and support.”

With the matter resolved, Lisa left Mrs. Kaira’s office feeling more confident and determined. She knew that she had done excellent work, and she was ready to take on new challenges.

Aubery, who was waiting outside, smiled when he saw Lisa emerge from Mrs. Kaira’s office.

“How did it go?” he asked.

Lisa smiled back. “It went well. Mrs. Kaira appreciated my work and told me to keep it confidential.”

Aubery nodded. “That’s great. You deserve the recognition.”

Together, they walked out of the office building, feeling more positive about their work and their abilities.

Aubery’s days were filled with restless nights and endless cups of coffee. His workload had increased significantly, and he was struggling to keep up.

The pressure to perform well on his qualifying exam was mounting, but he couldn’t seem to find the time to prepare.

Meanwhile, Lisa was also having a tough time. She was juggling multiple projects, scheduling meetings, and writing minutes.

The constant back-and-forth with her team and stakeholders was taking a toll on her. She felt overwhelmed and stressed, wondering how she would manage it all.

As Aubery sat at his desk, staring blankly at his notes, he couldn’t help but feel frustrated. He knew he needed to focus on his exam, but his work was piling up.

He was starting to feel like he was drowning in a sea of responsibilities.

Lisa, on the other hand, was running from one meeting to another, trying to keep up with the demands of her job. She was exhausted, both physically and mentally. Despite her best efforts, she couldn't seem to catch a break.

As the days went by, Aubery and Lisa continued to struggle. They were both feeling overwhelmed and stressed, wondering how they would manage their workload and achieve their goals.

One day, as they were both working late, Aubery turned to Lisa and said, "I don't know how much more of this I can take. I'm feeling so overwhelmed."

Lisa nodded in understanding.

"I know exactly what you mean. I'm feeling the same way. It's like we're both drowning in our work."

Aubery sighed.

"I just wish I could focus on my exam. I know I'm well-prepared, but I'm so worried that I'll mess it up."

Lisa offered words of encouragement. "You'll do great, Aubery. You're one of the most capable people I know. Just take it one step at a time, and you'll get through this."

Aubery smiled, feeling a sense of gratitude towards Lisa. "Thanks, Lisa. You're a lifesaver."

As they continued to work, Aubery and Lisa found solace in each other's company. They knew they were both in this together, and that gave them the strength to keep going.

Next day afternoon, Lisa sat alone in the lab, surrounded by the sterile smell of equipment and the faint hum of machinery. The fluorescent lights above cast an eerie glow, making her feel like a stranger in a place she was supposed to oversee.

Mrs. Kaira's sudden decision to send her to the lab still lingered in her mind, like a nagging doubt she couldn't shake.

"Why did Mrs. Kaira send me here?" Lisa wondered, her thoughts swirling with anxiety.

"Did I do something wrong? Am I being punished?"

As she sat there, Lisa's mind began to wander back to her conversation with Mrs. Kaira. She had seemed distant, almost detached, when discussing the lab issues.

Lisa's anxiety grew as she replayed the conversation in her head, searching for any hidden meaning or subtle hint that might explain why she was being sent to the lab.

With a deep breath, Lisa pushed aside her doubts and focused on the task at hand. She pulled out her notes and began to prepare the meeting minutes of the scientific review committee. The words flowed onto the

page as she worked, her hands moving with a practiced ease.

The lab was quiet, the only sound the soft whir of equipment and the occasional creak of the old building. Lisa felt a sense of solitude wash over her, like she was the only one left in the world.

As the hours passed, the lab people began to stir, gathering their belongings and heading out the door.

“Where are they going?” Lisa wondered, curiosity getting the better of her.

She watched as they filed out, Aubery among them. He didn’t mention anything about leaving or where he was headed. Lisa’s curiosity turned to concern as she realized she had no idea what Aubery was up to.

When Aubery returned, Lisa approached him, her voice laced with a mix of curiosity and concern.

“Hey, where did you go? You didn’t mention anything about it earlier.”

Aubery’s expression was neutral, but Lisa detected a hint of evasiveness in his eyes.

“I went to a colleague’s birthday party. It’s someone close to our lab, so I thought I’d drop by.”

Lisa’s eyes narrowed slightly, her mind racing with questions.

“You didn’t mention it earlier. Why did you keep it a secret?”

Aubery shrugged, his smile a little too casual.

“It wasn’t a big deal. I didn’t want to distract you from your work.”

Lisa nodded, but the seed of doubt had been planted. She couldn’t shake the feeling that Aubery was hiding something from her.

As the day drew to a close, Aubery offered to give Lisa a ride home.

“I’ll pick you up from near the restaurant, okay?” he said, his tone light and friendly.

Lisa agreed, still feeling a bit perplexed about Aubery’s mysterious behaviour. As they drove home, Lisa’s thoughts swirled with questions. What was Aubery hiding? And why did Mrs. Kaira send her to the lab?

The ride was mostly silent, with Aubery occasionally asking Lisa about her day. Lisa responded briefly; her mind still preoccupied with the events of the day.

When they reached Lisa’s place, Aubery bid her goodnight and drove off. Lisa watched him go, a mix of emotions swirling inside her. She wasn’t sure what to make of Aubery’s behaviour, but she knew she needed to talk to him about it soon.

As she stood there, lost in thought, Lisa realized that her feelings of uncertainty and doubt were not just about Aubery's actions, but also about her own role in the lab.

Was she just a spy, as Mrs. Kaira had implied?

Or was she there to genuinely help the lab and its people?

The questions lingered in her mind, refusing to be silenced. Lisa knew she had to find answers, not just about Aubery's mysterious behaviour, but also about her own place in the lab and her relationship with Mrs. Kaira.

The next day, Mrs. Kaira's instructions to Lisa were clear and direct.

"I want you to sit in the lab from now on and continue your work from there," she said, her voice firm and authoritative.

Lisa's confusion was palpable as she struggled to understand the reasoning behind Mrs. Kaira's decision.

"But why?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

Mrs. Kaira's expression turned serious.

"Someone is trying to interfere with the lab and turn the lab people against me. I need you to keep an eye on them, monitor their activities, and report back to me."

Lisa's eyes widened in shock as she processed Mrs. Kaira's words. She felt like she was being asked to spy on her colleagues, to gather information and report back to Mrs. Kaira.

The thought made her uncomfortable, and she didn't know how to respond.

"How am I supposed to do this?" Lisa asked, trying to clarify her role.

"You'll sit in the lab and observe their activities," Mrs. Kaira replied.

"Note down any unusual behaviour, any conversations that seem suspicious, and report back to me. You're acting on my behalf, so make sure you're thorough and accurate."

Lisa nodded silently, still trying to wrap her head around the situation. She packed up her belongings and switched her desk to the lab, feeling a sense of unease as she settled into her new role.

The lab people, including Aubery, were confused and curious about Lisa's sudden move to the lab. They whispered among themselves, trying to figure out what was going on.

Mrs. Kaira appeared again, her voice firm and commanding.

“Let me make one thing clear: Ms. Lisa will be sitting here from now on. She’s here to observe and report to me if anything goes wrong. She’s acting on my behalf, so don’t try to involve her in your work or discuss anything with her. She’s not here to help you with your projects.”

Lisa felt a pang of discomfort as she listened to Mrs. Kaira’s words. She didn’t like being put in this position, and she wasn’t sure how to navigate the complex web of relationships in the lab.

As Mrs. Kaira left, the lab people looked at Lisa with a mixture of curiosity and suspicion. Lisa remained silent; her eyes fixed on her work as she tried to process the strange turn of events.

Aubery, in particular, seemed puzzled by Lisa’s new role. He glanced at her occasionally, trying to gauge her reaction to the situation. Lisa, however, remained stoic, her expression neutral as she focused on her work.

The tension in the lab was palpable, and Lisa couldn’t help but wonder how this new development would affect her relationships with her colleagues. She felt like she was walking a tightrope, trying to balance her loyalty to Mrs. Kaira with her growing friendships in the lab.

As the day wore on, Lisa’s thoughts swirled with questions and doubts. How would she navigate this complex situation? And what would be the consequences of her new role in the lab?

The tension in the lab surged, heavy and unmistakable. Mrs. Kaira's voice rang through the corridor, each word weighted with disappointment and suspicion.

"No one leaves the lab without my permission. I know what happened—I heard from my sources," she declared, her eyes narrowed on the huddled group of staff.

The atmosphere pulsed with unease. Lisa felt the eyes of her colleagues on her, sharp and accusing. Murmurs followed—soft but unmistakable—as they speculated that Lisa must be the informant, the one who betrayed them to authority.

Her throat tightened, the unfairness stinging as she stood silently, refusing to defend herself against rumours she knew were untrue.

Mrs. Kaira's instructions were firm.

"No one here is to speak to Mr. Amar. And Lisa, it's your responsibility to make sure he stays out of this lab."

The words cut through the remaining civility, isolating Lisa even further.

Lisa nodded, her jaw set, determined to follow Mrs. Kaira's orders even though they felt harsh and unreasonable.

She wanted to shout her innocence, but knew it would only feed the rumour mill further.

Aubery glanced at her from across the room, a look of solidarity passing between them—both understanding the danger in the lab’s shifting allegiances.

Lisa asked Mrs. Kaira why she did not want Mr. Amar to enter into the lab?

Lisa’s eyes widened in surprise as she processed Mrs. Kaira’s words.

Mrs. Kaira’s expression turned serious.

“I’ve received information that the lab people have been going outside without permission, and I have reason to believe that Mr. Amar is involved. I want you to keep a close eye on him and prevent him from entering the lab.”

The lab people, including Aubery, looked at Lisa with suspicion and anger. They seemed to believe that she was the one who had reported their actions to Mrs. Kaira.

Lisa felt a pang of discomfort as she realized that her new role was not only about observing her colleagues but also about enforcing Mrs. Kaira’s rules.

She didn’t know how to navigate this complex situation, and she wasn’t sure if she was comfortable with being seen as a “snitch” by her colleagues.

As the crowd dispersed, Lisa's heart pounded with a mix of anxiety and resolve. The burden of misplaced blame pressed down on her, but she knew she must persevere

As the day wore on, Lisa tried to focus on her work while also keeping an eye on Mr. Amar. She felt like she was walking a tightrope, trying to balance her loyalty to Mrs. Kaira with her growing friendships in the lab.

When Mr. Amar arrived at the lab, Lisa felt a sense of anxiety. She knew that she had to stop him from entering the lab, but she wasn't sure how to do it without causing a scene.

"Hi, Lisa," Mr. Amar said, smiling as he approached the lab door.

"What's going on?"

Lisa hesitated, unsure of how to respond. She didn't want to cause any trouble, but she also didn't want to disobey Mrs. Kaira's instructions.

"I'm not sure you're allowed to enter the lab," Lisa said finally, trying to sound firm but polite.

Mr. Amar looked at her in surprise. "What's going on, Lisa? Why can't I enter the lab?"

Lisa shrugged, feeling uncomfortable. "I don't know, Mr. Amar. Mrs. Kaira's instructions."

Mr. Amar's expression turned serious. "I see. Well, I'll have to talk to Mrs. Kaira about this."

As Mr. Amar turned to leave, Lisa felt a sense of relief. She had done what Mrs. Kaira had asked her to do, but she couldn't shake the feeling that she had just made things worse.

Aubery joined her quietly, offering silent support.

"You're not alone in this," he assured her.

"Rumors fade, but your integrity lasts. We'll get through this together."

After Mrs. Kaira's strict warnings and the pointed accusations, the atmosphere in the lab turned colder. Where once Lisa found camaraderie—a smile in passing, light conversations over tea, offers of collaboration—now silence hung heavy in every corridor.

Her colleagues began keeping their distance; some stopped coming to the lab altogether, and those who remained refused to meet her gaze or speak unless absolutely necessary.

Wherever Lisa went, rumors swirled. Whispers accused her of arrogance, elders muttered that her attitude was shameful, and new allegations claimed she kept everyone away and snitched every minor infraction to Mrs. Kaira.

No matter how many times Lisa replayed her actions, she could not find the moment she had wronged her coworkers or failed to show respect. Her record, stretching back months, was one of fairness and friendship—never antagonism.

Yet the stories grew louder with each passing day, infecting the lab's spirit and nibbling away at her own sense of belonging. Every door that closed too quickly, every hushed voice behind her back, warned of trust lost and bridges burning in the dark.

Lisa's heart ached for the simple harmony she once knew; she longed to return to the days when she moved freely among peers, unburdened by suspicion and malice.

Three long months passed. The pace of life was relentless, but for Lisa, time seemed to slow—each day spent searching for answers, trying to understand the cause of this slow estrangement. She felt trapped in a maze of misunderstandings, her intentions twisted until she barely recognized the reflection her colleagues saw.

Sleep brought little relief. Even at home, the chaos of the lab haunted her, and the question kept looping in her mind:

How did I become the villain in a story that isn't mine?

Lisa clung to the hope that truth and kindness would eventually light her path out, but the loneliness weighed heavy. In the quiet moments, she wondered if things would ever return to the way they'd been—or if some wounds in the workplace could never fully heal.

Lisa stood outside Mrs. Kaira's office, her heart filled with a mix of emotions. She had been working in the lab for what felt like an eternity, and she was eager to return to her cabin. She had given her best to discipline the lab people, and she believed it was time for her to move on.

As she entered Mrs. Kaira's office, she was met with a stern expression.

"Mrs. Kaira, I've been thinking," Lisa said, trying to sound confident.

"I've been working in the lab for a while now, and I believe the lab people have become more disciplined. I was wondering if I could return to my cabin now."

Mrs. Kaira's expression didn't change, but her voice took on a slightly sharper tone.

"I'm afraid that's not possible, Lisa. I need you to continue working from the lab. Whatever projects you're working on, I want you to do them from there."

Lisa felt a pang of disappointment and confusion.

What was going on? Why was Mrs. Kaira so keen on keeping her in the lab?

She tried to ask Mrs. Kaira about it, but Mrs. Kaira just brushed her off.

Why did Mrs. Kaira insist Lisa remain here? Was it distrust, jealousy, or something else moving in the shadows? Anxiety tapped at her each day, but answers stayed stubbornly hidden.

At first, the lab was a place of friction, every glance laced with tension and misunderstanding. Lisa could feel the silent accusations, could taste the rumours biting at the edges of every interaction.

Yet, despite the chill, she was resilient. She reached out, offering help, joining in laughter, putting her heart into every shared task. Gradually, with her genuine warmth and tireless spirit, the walls between her and her colleagues began to crumble.

As the days went by, Lisa found herself growing closer to the lab people. She started helping them with their work, and they began to appreciate her efforts.

Aubery, in particular, seemed to be drawn to her, and their relationship blossomed.

Through all the uncertainty, Aubery was her anchor. Their connection deepened, weaving a subtle network of daily rituals—a stolen coffee break, a supportive squeeze of a hand before a difficult meeting. They became

indispensable to each other, longing for simple moments together when the world around them became unpredictable.

Their commitment was not without friction; arguments and misunderstandings rippled between them when the pressures of work and the long days caught up. But their love overcame pride and frustration: never more than a day would pass without reconciliation, tenderness always winning out against turmoil.

But as they spent more time together, Lisa realized that being in a relationship wasn't all sunshine and rainbows. They fought, they argued, and they had their differences. But through it all, they learned to understand each other, to appreciate the love they shared.

Lisa felt like she was discovering a new side of herself. Lisa felt herself changing in ways she'd never anticipated. Once, she'd stood apart—disciplined, authoritative, more mentor than peer. Now she found herself joining the others in their pranks, jokes, and small rebellions. She was softer, lighter, relishing laughter and fleeting joy, grateful to be included again.

She was no longer the strict, organized professional she once was.

She was more relaxed, more herself. She was enjoying her time with Aubery, and she felt like she was growing as a person.

As she navigated her feelings for Aubery, Lisa also started thinking about her career. She was considering further studies, something that would help her grow professionally. Researching late into the night, she weighed options, scribbled notes, and wondered which path would serve her career and her heart best.

The uncertainty, though daunting, also felt thrilling—a world opening beyond the walls of her lab and her present circumstance. She found a few options that seemed promising, but she was torn between them.

Meanwhile, Aubery and Lisa's relationship continued to evolve. Through every moment of doubt, every confrontation with colleagues or inner turmoil, one truth anchored her: the love she shared with Aubery was larger than their circumstances.

They faced disagreements, yes. They stumbled and fell, yes. But at every turn, they chose to understand and forgive, letting kindness rebuild what anger tried to break. They faced challenges, but they always found a way to work through them.

They learned to communicate, to listen to each other, and to understand each other's perspectives.

One thing became clear to Lisa: her love for Aubery was greater than any obstacle they might face. She knew that she wanted to be with him, to build a life together.

But as she looked back at her time in the lab, Lisa couldn't help but wonder about Mrs. Kaira's true intentions. Why had she been so keen on keeping her in the lab? What was she hiding?

Lisa's thoughts were a jumble of emotions and questions, but one thing was certain: she was ready to face whatever came next, as long as she had Aubery by her side.

The tension between Lisa and Mrs. Kaira was palpable, and Lisa couldn't shake the feeling that there was more to Mrs. Kaira's motives than met the eye.

But for now, she was focused on her relationship with Aubery, and the love that seemed to grow stronger with each passing day.

As Lisa and Aubery navigated the ups and downs of their relationship, they learned to appreciate the little things about each other. They discovered new quirks, new habits, and new ways to make each other happy.

And through it all, Lisa realized that Love was not the end of the story—it was the beginning, the guiding light as she navigated the complexities of workplace politics, evolving dreams, and the tangled threads of human connection.

And for Lisa and Aubery, their love was a flame that burned bright, guiding them through the ups and downs of life.

Lisa's mind was a whirlwind of thoughts as she navigated her career options. She was torn between pursuing business administration, which would complement her current role, and psychology, which truly fascinated her.

As she delved deeper into the world of psychology, she found herself increasingly captivated by the subject matter.

Without fully committing to a specific path, Lisa began preparing for a career in psychology. She devoured books, attended seminars, and even started taking online courses.

Her multitasking personality allowed her to juggle multiple projects and interests simultaneously, and she found herself thriving in this environment.

Aubery, ever the supportive partner, was by her side every step of the way. He encouraged her to focus on her passions and offered guidance on how to prioritize her goals.

Lisa felt grateful to have him in her life, and she was determined to grow and develop as a person.

As Lisa explored the world of psychology, she began to see the connections between human behaviour and

her own experiences. She realized that her fascination with psychology wasn't just intellectual; it was also deeply personal.

She was drawn to the complexities of human relationships and the ways in which people interacted with each other.

Aubery noticed the change in Lisa and was impressed by her dedication.

"You're really passionate about psychology, aren't you?" he asked one day, as they sat together in the lab.

Lisa nodded enthusiastically.

"Yes, I am. I find it fascinating, and I think it could be really helpful in my career."

Aubery smiled. "You're amazing, Lisa. You can do anything you set your mind to."

Lisa felt a surge of confidence and motivation. With Aubery's support and her own determination, she knew she could achieve her goals.

She was excited to see where her journey would take her, and she was grateful to have Aubery by her side.

As they sat together, Lisa realized that she had found something special in Aubery. He wasn't just her partner; he was also her friend, her confidant, and her biggest supporter. She knew that she could rely on him, no matter what challenges lay ahead.

The future was uncertain, but one thing was clear: Lisa was ready to take on whatever came next, armed with her passion for psychology and the love and support of Aubery.

Dr. Karter, a renowned radiologist, had always regarded Lisa as a daughter. He took great pride in her accomplishments and encouraged her to pursue her academic interests.

Whenever visitors or guests came to the institution, Dr. Karter would make sure to introduce them to Lisa, showcasing her talents and capabilities.

Lisa's humility and politeness impressed everyone she met. Despite being offered numerous opportunities to work with prominent individuals, she would graciously decline, choosing to focus on her own goals and aspirations.

Aubery, on the other hand, was incredibly proud of Lisa. He admired her intelligence, her kindness, and her dedication to her work. Lisa, in turn, was eager to help Aubery advance in his own career.

She would often introduce him to influential people, hoping to open doors for him and provide him with valuable connections.

As Lisa and Aubery's relationship blossomed, they supported each other's goals and ambitions. They were

each other's biggest cheerleaders, encouraging and motivating each other to reach new heights.

Dr. Karter watched with joy as Lisa's relationship with Aubery flourished. He had always hoped for Lisa's happiness, and he could see that Aubery brought out the best in her.

"Lisa, my dear, you deserve all the happiness in the world," Dr. Karter would say, his eyes shining with warmth and affection.

Lisa would smile, feeling grateful for Dr. Karter's guidance and support. She knew that she could always count on him to be there for her, offering words of wisdom and encouragement whenever she needed it.

As Lisa navigated the complexities of her career and personal life, she knew that she had a strong support system in place. With Dr. Karter's mentorship and Aubery's love and support, she felt confident that she could overcome any obstacle and achieve her goals.

Lisa's kindness and generosity had earned her many admirers, but it also seemed to attract a fair share of detractors. Steffie, the lab in charge for Aubery's lab, was one such person who harboured a deep-seated resentment towards Lisa.

Steffie couldn't bear the fact that Lisa was widely respected and admired by everyone in the premises. She

began to spread false rumours and defame Lisa, trying to tarnish her reputation.

Lisa, however, tried to rise above the petty negativity, choosing to focus on her work and her relationships with people who truly mattered.

But Steffie's behaviour became increasingly erratic and hostile. She would often disrespect Lisa, provoking her and trying to get a rise out of her. Lisa, however, tried to maintain her composure, taking the high road and avoiding arguments with Steffie.

Countless times, Lisa bit her tongue and let Steffie's jabs go, not wanting to engage with someone who seemed determined to cause trouble.

But Steffie seemed to take Lisa's patience for weakness, and she continued to push boundaries.

One day, Steffie crossed a line. She questioned Lisa's authority in front of everyone, treating her like an assistant rather than a respected colleague. Lisa felt her patience snap, and she finally stood up for herself.

"Excuse me, Steffie," Lisa said calmly but firmly.

"I don't appreciate being spoken to in that tone. If you have any issues or concerns, I'd appreciate it if you could discuss them with me privately."

The room fell silent, and Steffie's face turned red with anger. But Lisa stood her ground, refusing to back down.

She knew that she had done nothing wrong, and she wasn't about to let Steffie's behaviour go unchecked.

Aubery, who had been watching the exchange, stepped forward.

"Steffie, I think Lisa has made it clear that she won't engage in unprofessional behavior. Perhaps we can discuss any issues you have in a more constructive manner?"

Steffie's anger seemed to dissipate slightly, replaced by a hint of embarrassment. She muttered something under her breath and stormed out of the room, leaving Lisa and Aubery to exchange a concerned glance.

"Are you okay?" Aubery asked, turning to Lisa.

Lisa nodded, her eyes flashing with determination.

"I'm fine, Aubery. But I think it's time I stood up for myself and set some boundaries."

Aubery glanced at her, his eyes filled with confusion.

"Yeah, that's okay. But you shouldn't have responded to her actually, I didn't know that you'll respond to her."

Lisa said, "Yes, even I thought of not responding but the way she's talking to me is not at all ok."

“I want to know what’s the issue she’s having with me”.

Aubery tried to calm her down by engaging her into other talks about her psychology analysis.

The next day, Lisa returned to the lab after a work-related outing, feeling refreshed and focused. As she entered the lab, the bustle of mid-morning activity was interrupted as Steffie approached, her posture rigid, a note of authority in her voice.

“Lisa, tea break is for 10 to 15 minutes, and more than that is not advisable as per the rules,” Steffie said, trying to lecture Lisa.

Lisa, looking up from her task, slightly puzzled. “What do you mean, Steffie?”

Steffie’s tone sharpened. “You were gone for more than half an hour. And you took one of our staff members along with you. Is this your professionalism?”

For a heartbeat, Lisa felt a surge of frustration rise inside—she’d only wanted a little time away, a break from the tension and the chaos. But beneath her calm exterior, a sting of embarrassment and defensiveness pricked her.

The words struck, unexpectedly harsh. Lisa felt her restraint, so carefully guarded through months of rumour and mistrust, beginning to unravel. Her

knuckles whitened around her notepad as she fought to maintain composure.

“What you’re thinking isn’t true, Steffie,” Lisa replied steadily, voice just above a tremor.

“For your information, I neither took your lab person with me anywhere, nor was I on a tea break. I went out for my own work.”

Secondly, I don’t even drink tea or coffee. So maybe you should be mindful of whom you question, and about what.”

“And as a reminder, I don’t work under you. You don’t have the right to question me about this.”

Steffie’s jaw tensed. “I am your elder, and you shouldn’t be speaking to me like this when I’m trying to teach you something.”

“You’ve no business taking people for tea breaks when they have work waiting. Because of you, lab work gets delayed.”

By now, colleagues had begun peering out from behind equipment, the air heavy with anticipation. Lisa didn’t flinch. The old habit of shrinking away from conflict was gone, replaced by purpose.

“What proof do you have that I took Veronica for a coffee break?” Lisa demanded, her eyes on Steffie.

“And what right do you have to lecture me?”

I know my responsibilities. I was always respectful of your position and your age—but you’ve crossed a line, confronting me baselessly.

“If you have an issue, speak to your lab mate before making accusations. Veronica happened to meet me as I was returning from my own work. There was no so-called tea break or time wasted.”

The hallway echoed with echoes of Lisa’s firmness. For a moment, Steffie’s certainty wavered, uncertainty flickering across her face. Around them, whispers quieted. Lisa turned, spine straight, refusing to wear any guilt that wasn’t hers to claim.

The brief confrontation left Lisa feeling oddly deflated, as if her efforts and cheerful intent were invisible behind a veil of scrutiny. She glanced toward Aubery, finding quiet reassurance in his supportive gaze.

Steffie raised an eyebrow.

“Save it, Lisa. We all know how you like to take extended breaks and socialize. It’s not fair to the rest of us who have to pick up the slack.”

Lisa’s patience was wearing thin. She had already dealt with Steffie’s condescending attitude earlier, and she wasn’t about to let it slide now.

“Steffie, I understand that you may have concerns about my work habits,” Lisa said firmly.

“But I’d appreciate it if you could address me in a respectful tone. I’m happy to discuss any issues you may have, but I won’t engage in unprofessional conversations.”

Also, if you want to complain about me, you’re free to do. You can complain on me to Mrs. Kaira as she’s my reporting Manager.

Steffie’s face turned red with anger, but Lisa stood her ground, refusing to back down. Aubery, who had been watching the exchange, stepped forward but Lisa stopped him.

Inside, her chest thudded with anger and trembling relief—a line had been drawn, and this time, she had not stepped back. She knew that she had finally stood up for herself, and she was ready to face whatever challenges came her way.

The lab was unusually silent after Lisa’s words echoed down the hallway. Eyes that once smiled at her now darted away. Conversations that might have included her dried up, replaced by a brittle awkwardness.

Even those with no stake in the quarrel seemed to shrink from her presence. The tension sat heavy, like humidity before a storm. Steffie herself stayed away, smarting from having her authority and, perhaps, her assumptions challenged so publicly.

Lisa tried to immerse herself in her tasks, but frustration lingered—a tight knot of injustice and exhaustion. She was proud she had stood up for herself, but she knew this would come at a cost. She worried about how she was being perceived.

The loneliness crept in, fueled by the whispered rumours now swirling with renewed vigor, many painting her as arrogant or insubordinate. Each day, the stress built, seeping into her sleep and gnawing at her confidence.

Aubery noticed the subtle withdrawals: the way Lisa hesitated before joining others for lunch, the way laughter died down when she approached.

One evening, he found her at her desk long past quitting time, the glow of her monitor highlighting the tiredness in her eyes.

He settled beside her, offering quiet reassurance.

“You did the right thing, Lisa. You have every right to defend yourself. If they’re uncomfortable, maybe they should examine why.”

Lisa’s voice was a whisper.

“It’s not just about right and wrong, Aubery. It’s about peace. I want to do good work, to belong—not to be the reason everyone walks on eggshells.”

Aubery squeezed her hand.

“Sometimes, being true to yourself means choosing discomfort over false harmony. Whatever comes, I’m with you.”

His words warmed her. Gradually, she found the courage to reach out again—inviting teammates to collaborate and lending an ear where she could.

Some responded, their suspicion slowly thawing; others did not. Through it all, Lisa learned the delicate balance: when to stand firm, when to let go, and when love and self-respect mattered most.

Her relationship with Aubery grew, not in spite of the tension, but because of it. Together, they learned that real partnership wasn’t the absence of conflict, but the willingness to face it side by side—committed to truth and to each other, no matter how the winds in the lab might shift.

And although peace wasn’t immediate, Lisa’s quiet resilience became its own kind of answer—proof that sometimes, to find belonging, one must risk standing alone, at least for a while.

The rumour fog finally lifted. Whispers turned into apologies that never quite reached Lisa’s ears, and the same colleagues who had stepped back began, one by one, to drift closer again—asking for her input, sharing jokes in the corridor, inviting her to project discussions like before. It was relief, gentle and overdue.

But life rarely returns to balance without tipping something else. Something darker began to cloud Lisa's world.

It began as small betrayals of the body—light-headed mornings, a nagging ache that visited without warning. She was tired—tired in a way that no amount of sleep could fix.

She brushed off the wave of fatigue, told herself she could handle headaches and missed meals, that work always came before well-being. Work was full, life was fuller, and joy, when it came, came in busy handfuls.

Aubery, observant in his quiet, careful way, noticed her pale skin and thinning patience, how she never touched her lunch anymore. He watched the signs collect like quiet warnings. He didn't accuse or scold.

He started slipping fruit into her bag or peeling fruits and making her eat fruits and nuts, setting reminders on her phone, texting her to drink water, to take a breath, to sit in the sunlight for ten minutes between meetings.

And when her colour paled and the pain sharpened, worry gnawed at him. He insisted on a doctor's visit, Lisa yielded, her resolve weakened by exhaustion. He took her hand—no arguments—and led her to the hospital.

He spoke with the doctor softly, his voice careful, questions lined up in his notebook. The doctor's words

hit Aubery like a stone: the condition was serious. Surgery was required—minor, perhaps, but unavoidable.

When words landed that he feared—words edged with necessity—his composure wavered. He didn't want her to see the crack in him, so he smoothed it over with care: prescriptions collected, appointments aligned, his own worry wrapped neatly inside a steady smile.

But truth has its own timing.

At the follow-up, as he stood with the doctor just beyond the doorway, Lisa paused. Their voices—the cadence of caution and clinical certainty—carried just enough.

“Medication hasn't resolved it,” the doctor said. “Surgery is the prudent option now. Waiting increases the risk of complications.”

Silence. Aubery's. Heavy, stunned.

“Please, just—don't frighten her. I don't want to see her break down.”

Lisa pressed her hand to her chest, forcing herself to stand straight as she entered the room. Her voice was clear, unwavering, even as her heart raced.

“Okay, Doctor. I'll go with the surgery.”

Aubery turned sharply, torn between relief and fear. “Lisa...”

He searched her eyes for fear but found only acceptance—an echo of the courage he so loved in her.

She reached for his hand. “It’s minor. And I’m not afraid. What scares me is pretending I’m fine while my body asks for help.”

Her voice softened. “You heard him. We don’t wait.”

But later, when he was alone, Aubery felt the sting of helplessness, wondering how he could possibly be enough—how love alone could hold someone together when their body was determined to break apart.

In the days that followed, their love changed shape. Not smaller. Not larger. Just truer.

Aubery’s strength was quiet—rides to appointments, careful meals, his shoulder a place she could lean without asking.

And when she snapped at him once, nerves frayed and patience thin, he didn’t meet fire with fire.

He stepped closer. “I’m not leaving,” he said.

“Not for fear, not for anger, not for anything.”

Lisa, for her part, found courage in surrender. She let him sit with her when the nights went long. She told him the things she usually handles alone—the thoughts that arrive when lights are off and courage has to be rebuilt from something soft.

“If I’ve been reckless with my body,” she whispered one evening, “it’s because I thought I had to be strong for everything else.”

He brushed a stray hair from her face.

“Let me be strong for us too.”

On the morning they signed the papers, the hospital smelled of antiseptic and hope. Lisa breathed deeply, calm and composed.

Aubery’s hand was warm around hers, his thumb tracing small circles, as if memorizing the rhythm of her pulse.

“If you want to delay—” he began.

“No delays,” she said, a small smile touching her lips.

“We do this, and then we go home.”

He swallowed, nodding. “We go home.”

The nurse came. The door swung. They shared a look that said more than yes or goodbye or be brave.

It said I choose you in the middle of the unknown.

As Lisa was guided toward the theatre, Aubery stood for a long moment in the corridor, spine straight, eyes bright with unshed fear and fierce loyalty.

He took a breath, sat down, and began to write her a note—words she would read when she woke, words

about love that doesn't perform, it perseveres; about bodies that falter and hearts that refuse to.

When the doors finally opened and her name was called, he rose at once. He moved toward her gently, the way dawn moves toward a quiet window.

"Aubery?" she called; her voice not stable.

"Ha," he answered, his relief breaking into laughter he couldn't hold back.

"How are you?"

"They didn't do anything for me, they gave me anaesthesia and then the power cut happened. And just after 5 mins I'm here" she said, with her voice trembling and confused.

Aubery smiled and

"Ok, you take rest. I'll talk to them why they didn't do anything to you" he said with a smile on his face as he's looking at her face how naive she's.

And in that small, ordinary recovery room, with machines humming soft and sunlight slanting across white sheets, they made a simple, unglamorous promise—the kind that lasts: to listen when the body speaks, to rest without apology, to choose the long, steady love that carries two lives forward, carefully and together.

The first day after the surgery, Lisa awoke groggy but relieved. The dull ache in her body was softened by the steady presence of Aubery sitting beside her bed.

He was there before dawn, a quiet sentinel armed with water, medicine, and soft words. He checked on her every hour, helping her adjust the pillows or bringing her a cool cloth to soothe her forehead.

His care was unspoken but deeply felt—a patient attention that wrapped around her like a warm blanket despite the sterile hospital room.

Lisa found comfort not just in his presence but in his unwavering calm. When the nurses came to check her vitals or change dressings, Aubery quietly took notes and asked questions, learning everything he could to help Lisa heal better.

He lightened her doubts with gentle reassurances, reminding her she was stronger than the pain and the fear.

On the second day, Lisa struggled with the frustration of her weakened body, the restlessness of confinement. Yet Aubery was there, balancing his own tiredness, preparing meals, and helping her with small activities—encouraging short walks in the hall or light stretches the doctor recommended. He never left her side longer than necessary and coaxed smiles when the heaviness threatened to overwhelm her.

By the third day, Lisa's strength began to return in small but promising bursts. She was able to sit up longer, talk more easily, and even laugh softly at one of Aubery's quiet jokes.

Their eyes met with a shared understanding—that though the road ahead might still be long, this moment was a victory.

Aubery helped her up for a steady walk down the corridor, leaning close in case she needed support. They talked quietly about future plans; the dreams paused but not lost.

Throughout this time, Lisa realized how much Aubery's quiet devotion meant—his way of caring not always flashy but steady and sure.

And Aubery, watching her recover, felt his love deepen with a fierce promise: to be her strength when she faltered, her calm when the world rushed in.

The morning Lisa stepped back into the lab, the air felt different—brighter, charged with both anticipation and a quiet sense of victory. Her recovery had been steady, and though her body still demanded caution, her spirit soared with the simple freedom of reclaiming her space.

Aubery walked beside her, careful to match her pace, offering silent support without overwhelming her regained independence. The familiar hum of machines,

the rustle of papers, and the focused energy of colleagues filled the room like a tentative welcome.

Lisa's first days back were gentle—a careful balance of easing into tasks while listening to the subtle signals her body sent. She greeted her co-workers cautiously, noting the softened glances and tentative smiles in her direction. Some faces still held shadows of doubt, but many carried the warmth of renewed respect and concern.

Her work rhythm returned slowly. With each experiment planned, each data set analysed, Lisa felt strength return—not just physical but the confidence that had been tested so severely. Aubery's presence nearby, always ready with a word of encouragement or to lend a hand, made the burden lighter, the challenges smaller.

Meetings with Mrs. Kaira and the team resumed, and with them came a renewed sense of purpose.

Lisa shared her insights from recovery and reflected on how important balance was—not just in work, but in health and partnerships.

She spoke openly about the lessons learned, inspiring colleagues to consider their own well-being alongside their ambitions.

Through every task, every conversation, Aubery and Lisa crafted a new rhythm—not simply of workmates, but

of partners united in growth, resilience, and quiet, enduring love.

The lab had settled into its usual midday rhythm, the muted clatter of keyboards and soft hum of equipment forming a familiar backdrop. Lisa sat at her workstation; eyes focused on the screen but mind drifting to the quiet strength Aubery embodied beside her.

He was reviewing notes, fingers tracing over papers with a careful precision that reminded her of the care he showed in all things, especially in their fragile moments together.

Without looking up, Aubery's voice broke the comfortable silence.

"You're doing better than I expected."

Lisa let out a soft laugh, tension easing from her shoulders.

"That might be a compliment or a warning."

He smiled, finally meeting her gaze with an intensity that sent warmth straight to her core. "It's both."

The moment stretched between them, a quiet space where words were less important than the shared heartbeat of understanding.

Aubery reached out, brushing a stray lock of hair from her face—a small gesture, but one loaded with years of unspoken promises.

Lisa leaned into the touch, her voice barely above a whisper.

“Thank you for not giving up on me.”

Aubery’s fingers curled gently around hers.

“I never could. We’re in this together—through every question, every fear.”

She squeezed his hand, feeling the steady pulse beneath her fingertips, a reminder that no matter what challenges lay ahead, their love was a refuge.

In that moment, the lab faded away—the world reduced to two souls tethered by trust and the quiet power of being truly seen.

As the week unfolded, a quiet excitement stirred in Lisa’s heart. Aubery’s birthday was fast approaching, and she wanted to gift him something extraordinary—something that would hold the weight of their shared memories and the promise of their future.

She spent evenings researching ideas, scouring shops, and cautiously navigating online stores. Her quest was not without setbacks; a few times she fell prey to frauds who took advantage of her goodwill, draining some of her hard-saved money.

But those losses softened beneath her growing determination. The joy of planning, of envisioning his smile, erased every worry.

One afternoon, after parting ways with Aubery at the lab, Lisa went out alone, weaving through boutiques and artisan stores, gathering inspiration and hope.

She considered what he truly needed, what would speak to his quiet strength—the piece of himself often hidden beneath layers of duty.

Finally, a choice emerged from the swirl of possibilities:

A classic item something timeless that would mark not just hours and minutes but moments between them. She arranged for it to be engraved with their initials, a secret symbol of their unity.

But no celebration would be complete without sharing joy with those who mattered.

Lisa invited her close friend Stacy and her husband Tyson, joyful allies in this plan. Together with lab mates, they prepared small tokens of gratitude and crafted a surprise that folded friendship and fellowship into the day.

When Aubery's birthday arrived, Lisa's heart beat fast beneath her carefully measured calm. The lab buzzed with energy as Aubery hosted a midday cake cutting, a gesture of thanks to the team that had supported him.

Laughter and applause filled the space, gifts presented— a polo t-shirt and a rare jacket that quickly became the envy of the lab.

But Lisa kept her secret close. Though the room was alive with celebration, she waited until evening when Aubery rose to make plans with his friends.

Calm and confident, she approached him.

“Tonight,” she smiled, “we’re going out. Be ready by 6:30.”

He nodded, curiosity shining in his eyes. “Where?”

She only smiled, a secret held tightly beneath her breath, and turned away.

Their evening began with a familiar route and ended in the softly lit dining room of their favourite restaurant—a place where old memories blended with new ones.

Stacy and Tyson were there, warm greetings exchanged, laughter rippling through the air.

Dinner was a feast not just of food but of connection. Between bites, Lisa slipped a box across the table to Aubery.

He opened it slowly, fingers trembling slightly. The classic and elegant silver analogue watch gleamed in the low light—a gleaming promise of time held and time to come.

“Why all this?” he whispered, awe mixing with gratitude.

Lisa touched the watch tenderly. “So, every second reminds you of me... of us. Our initials are engraved for that reason—our time together.”

Aubery’s eyes shimmered as emotion spilled freely.

Stacy and Tyson added their own thoughtful gifts—a water bottle and a book—each piece another thread woven into a tapestry of friendship and love.

That night, laughter and light filled their space. The restaurant lights flickered around them as they captured the moments in photographs, their shared smiles magnetic and true.

Compliments came from fellow diners, marvelling at a pair so perfectly suited and the photograph postures as well as a perfect couple with a beautiful smile and energy.

When they finally returned home, feet tired but hearts full, Lisa and Aubery shared a quiet, unspoken vow—of love deepened not just by grand gestures, but by the tender, everyday acts that built a life together.

Together, wrapped in warmth and joy, they slipped into sleep, their dreams carrying the promise of countless moments still to come.

The weeks leading to Aubery's qualifying exam, the pressure mounted relentlessly. His days were filled with restless hours, unexpected work complications, and the constant juggling of responsibilities that left little room for proper study.

Though he managed stolen moments to review notes and texts, the time never seemed enough.

The weight of unpreparedness gnawed at his confidence, whispering doubts: How can I give my best without the preparation I need?

Lisa stood beside him every step of the way—a steady pillar in the storm. She quizzed him gently, made notes, brewed quiet encouragement during tense evenings, and kept reminding him to breathe, to rest, to keep faith. For both of them, this exam was a culmination of hope, sacrifice, and dreams yet to be fulfilled.

When exam day finally arrived, Lisa waited outside the examination venue, heart swelling with pride and hope.

The sunlight cast a warm glow over her face as Aubery stepped inside, carrying their shared dreams with him. She smiled, trusting in him, even as a nervous flutter danced in her chest.

Aubery entered the hall, leaving behind a trail of silent hopes.

Minutes ticked into what felt like hours. To distract herself, Lisa opened Aubery's phone, absentmindedly scrolling through their shared memories.

Then she stopped—there it was:

A photo of a woman, she recognized who she's.

Her breath caught in her throat—a cold knot of unease tightening inside her.

Why was her photo with Aubery?

Despite herself, curiosity spiraled into alarm, and Lisa found herself opening Aubery's WhatsApp.

The screen revealed a painful truth. Aubery had been in contact with that woman—flirting, sending sweet words that mirrored those he shared with Lisa.

The messages, dating back to midsummer, carved deep wounds in Lisa's heart.

Aubery had initiated the chats, casually weaving affection where Lisa believed she alone had claim.

Her world shattered in silence. Trust crumbled, love unspoken, needs unmet. Tears blurred the screen as she read the betrayed words three times over, seeking a sliver of innocence—but found none.

Lisa's heart broke quietly in the shadows of that exam hall. Her trust crumbled beneath the weight of betrayal. Tears stung as she scrolled again, hoping for misunderstanding but finding none.

She considered running away, leaving it all behind, but Aubery was still inside the exam hall. He didn't know. He couldn't know—not yet.

Patiently, painfully, she waited, words lodged in her throat, heart heavy and suffocated.

When Aubery finally emerged, Lisa's gaze met his, pain and fury dancing in her eyes. She wanted to scream, to slap, to shatter the image she held. She wanted to confront him with every shattered piece of her heart, to demand why and how.

Yet, words failed her—silence gripping her instead with its unbearable weight.

“Aubery,” she whispered, voice brittle, wishing she could break through the walls that suddenly seemed to tower between them.

He smiled, unaware of the tempest within her. “Hey, how was your wait?”

His voice was like a knife to her heart, twisting and turning, making her feel like she was going to bleed out.

Lisa's glance faltered. The man she loved was a stranger now, and the chasm between trust and doubt yawned wide.

The silence between them seemed to stretch out like an eternity, and Lisa felt like she was drowning in her own tears.

Lisa stood frozen, the screen casting a cold light on her tear-streaked face. Her heart shattered into a thousand jagged pieces as the messages unfolded before her—proof of a betrayal she never imagined.

The man she loved, the man she trusted, had sought another's company behind her back, weaving words of affection with someone who wasn't her.

Shock slammed into her first. It was like the air was knocked out of her lungs.

How could this be true?

Was she imagining the meaning behind the words, the tone of the texts?

But the more she recalled, the more the cold reality settled in.

Aubery's initiations, his flirtations—they were undeniable. The trust she had given so freely crumbled beneath the weight of deceit.

Anger rippled beneath the surface, fierce and raw.

How dare he? How could he risk everything they had built?

The whispers of doubt that had brushed her heart before now screamed aloud, carving deep wounds of humiliation and confusion.

She punched the air inside her mind, mourning a love fractured into fragments.

Sadness flooded her next, sweeping over her like a relentless tide. The dreams they had nurtured, the promises held in silent glances, now felt tainted, as if the foundation beneath her feet had shifted without warning.

She questioned everything—her worth, her choices, the future she had imagined. The ache was physical, a heaviness in her chest that made breathing a labour.

Doubt gnawed mercilessly. Could this have been a mistake?

Was there more she didn't know? Could love survive such rupture?

The questions multiplied with no answers, and the silence between them stretched unbearably long.

She wanted to confront him, to scream at the night for the pain it had brought, but fear and sorrow sealed her lips.

Yet beneath the wreckage, a tiny flicker of resolve glowed. Lisa knew she could not unravel herself completely—she had to navigate this storm, to decide whether to rebuild or to let go.

The path was unclear, winding through valleys of hurt and peaks of longing, but she promised herself to face it one breath at a time.

In that moment, she knew she had to make a decision. She could confront him, or she could walk away. But as she looked into his eyes, she saw only love and adoration, and she wondered if she had misread the situation entirely.

Or maybe she just wanted to believe that she had. The uncertainty hung in the air, a palpable weight that threatened to suffocate her.

Lisa's thoughts were interrupted by Aubery's gentle voice.

"Hey, Lisa, are you ready to go?" he asked, standing beside the vehicle.

Lisa looked up, slightly startled, and smiled as she met Aubery's eyes.

"Yeah, I'm ready," she replied, gathering her belongings.

As she slid into the passenger seat, Aubery closed the door behind her and walked around to the driver's side.

The warm sunlight streaming through the windows highlighted the contours of his face, and Lisa felt a dagger in her chest.

As they drove through the city streets, the silence between them was uncomfortable.

Days passed in a fragile haze. Lisa moved through each moment with a heavy heart, the weight of betrayal settling deeper with each breath.

She found herself retreating into silence, her smiles tightening, eyes distant. Friends noticed her quietness; the light in her voice dimmed.

Yet she masked the turmoil well, careful not to let her pain spill into public view.

At night, when the world softened, her thoughts swirled—memories of love and laughter now tangled with doubt and hurt.

She questioned everything: Her worth, their future, her place in his life. The ache was raw, a relentless echo that refused to quiet.

Aubery, sensing the change but unaware of its cause, tried to bridge the growing distance.

He reached out gently—texts filled with warmth and hope, quiet gestures to draw her close. But Lisa held back, stalled by the fear of shattering what little stability remained.

Finally, as tension knotted between them in a silent storm, Lisa knew the time had come—the time to make a decision.

Sitting together in the soft glow of the evening, Lisa took a breath heavy with unshed tears.

Lisa decided to confront her feelings and doubts. She told Aubery that she didn't want to waste her time sitting in the lab, that she wasn't learning anything useful for her professional life. It was an excuse, a way to distance herself from the situation.

Aubery looked at her with concern.

"What's wrong, Lisa? You've been acting strange lately," he said, his voice filled with worry.

Lisa shook her head, trying to brush off her feelings.

"I'm just feeling a bit overwhelmed, that's all. I need to focus on my career."

Aubery nodded understandingly.

"Okay, I'll support you. But is everything okay? You seem distant."

Lisa forced a smile, trying to reassure him.

"Everything's fine, Aubery. I just need some space, that's all."

Lisa wrestled with a storm of emotions she struggled to name. The chats she had uncovered went back to the very beginning of their relationship—when everything still felt fragile and new.

The woman Aubery had flirted with wasn't a stranger but a research fellow in another department, someone around the edges of his professional world.

Aubery's calm demeanour, his steady kindness, everything Lisa thought she knew about him, seemed at odds with the words on that screen.

Was it a mistake from his past?

A moment of weakness long buried?

Or was there something still hidden beneath the surface?

Every time she walked beside Aubery to the cafeteria, the ghost of those messages haunted her—words of affection that now felt intrusive, igniting discomfort she couldn't explain.

Mixed feelings flooded her: irritation, hurt, confusion, love, and doubt all tangled together.

She found herself replaying the messages, analysing every detail, every nuance of Aubery's days, searching for any sign, any proof that he was still deceitful.

Suspicion wasn't her nature—yet it perched on her shoulder now, whispering, showing her the same lines she'd read a hundred times, insisting she look again.

But there was none. In her heart, a small and stubborn part refused to believe that Aubery was cheating.

Still, the weight of uncertainty gnawed at her, pushing her toward a quiet escape. The lab, once a place

of purpose and passion, became a cage where her thoughts spiraled into their own private torment.

Lisa craved release—an escape into a world of her own making, where the shadows of doubt could not reach her.

In the days that followed, Lisa's mind became a crowded room—questions speaking over one another, answers refusing to sit still.

Lisa analyzed everything. She mapped timelines, recounted late nights, replayed gestures of care. Nothing in his recent days suggested he was unfaithful. Perhaps she simply did not want to believe it.

Her heart, tender and brave, clung to what it knew of his constancy; her mind traced the evidence until the lines blurred into ache.

One afternoon, sitting amid the clatter of the lab, Lisa realized she was choosing between two prisons: the prison of doubt and the prison of denial.

She wanted a third way—space.

Breath.

A room where silence could soothe rather than suffocate.

She imagined a place where she wasn't forced to pass the cafeteria table that now felt haunted by a stranger's

smile, where every corridor didn't echo with a memory she did not make.

So, she chose the mercy of distance. Not to punish him. Not to pretend. But to stop the bleeding.

Summoning courage she did not fully feel, Lisa summoned Aubery aside one afternoon. Her voice was steady but layered with unspoken pain.

"Aubery... I don't want to lose my respect, or waste my worthy time sitting here, feeling like I'm not learning or growing.

This lab—these days—they don't feel like my future."

She looked into his eyes, seeking understanding, longing for reassurance, but determined to stand for herself.

"I need to stop hurting inside. I need to find peace—even if it means stepping away."

Aubery's face flickered with concern, the tension between them thick yet fragile—an unspoken plea to bridge the widening gap.

For Lisa, it was a moment of reckoning: honouring her heart's truth, even if it meant walking a new path—alone or together.

In the days that followed, Lisa gave herself permission to retreat from the lab's daily churn. She worked remotely when possible, sought tasks that grew

her skills, and began drafting applications—programs other jobs and courses that might open different doors.

She journaled when memory burned too brightly, walked when silence grew too loud, and allowed herself to cry when tears insisted on truth.

She practiced the small mercies: eating real meals, sleeping without apology, calling friends who reminded her she was more than this moment.

Some nights, the memories returned like storms, and she braced against the flashbacks, each image a spark to kindling she could not control.

When that happened, she reminded herself:

Feel, then release. One breath. Then another.

She could not rebuild trust overnight, with him or with herself—but she could refuse to abandon herself again.

And yet love, inconvenient and resilient, did not vanish. It lingered, tender and complicated, in the space between them.

Lisa did not mistake love for permission to forget. Nor did she confuse pain for proof that the story was over.

She lived in the paradox—carrying both the wound and the wish to heal.

When she was ready, there would be a conversation. Questions asked with courage. Answers offered without disguise.

A path chosen in daylight.

For now, she chose her own hand to hold. She chose a future that did not depend on anyone's confession to begin.

And in that choice, something within her steadied—not certainty, not yet.

But a quiet, fierce respect for the woman who refused to disappear inside her own doubt.

“As Lisa stood alone in the quiet of her room, the weight of memories and unanswered questions pressed heavy on her heart. Outside, the city's hum whispered promises of new beginnings, but inside, she faced the silence of a love tested like never before.”

“Would their bond survive the storms ahead, or would the secrets lurking in the past pull them apart forever? Only time held the answer...”

“Dear Readers,

If you felt the flutter of hearts and the sting of betrayal, wait for the next book—it’s going to be unforgettable.” – Alina.

About the Author

Alina, a science graduate and passionate storyteller, makes her literary debut with *My Last Love: Beyond the Interview*, a moving romance inspired by real-life experiences. What began as an intimate practice of preserving personal memories in a diary gradually evolved into a profound narrative of love, resilience, and second chances.

Her academic foundation in science, coupled with a natural flair for creative expression, lends a unique perspective to her writing. Alina’s ability to balance emotional depth with thoughtful detail allows her stories to resonate with readers on both a personal and universal level. Through her work, she captures the delicate interplay between vulnerability and strength, bringing authenticity to every page.

Beyond writing, Alina nurtures her creative side through sketching, crafting, and artistic hobbies that enrich her imagination. She continues to balance her

professional career with her dedication to storytelling, finding inspiration in the contrasts of logic and creativity.

My Last Love: Beyond the Interview not only marks a memorable debut but also the beginning of Alina's promising literary journey, one defined by heartfelt narratives and an unwavering passion for storytelling.

About the Book

“My Last Love: Beyond the Interview”

Where trust is the hardest discovery, and love the bravest science.

My Last Love: Beyond the Interview is a razor-edged workplace romance set in a modern research institute, where love collides with ambition, secrets, and power plays.

Lisa, a poised and meticulous executive assistant, finds her ordered world shaken when Aubery, a guarded yet charismatic junior scientist, enters her life. What begins with a simple interview message soon sparks undeniable chemistry, growing into a secret relationship filled with tension, passion, and vulnerable truths.

But their bond is quickly tested—by jealous colleagues, manipulative politics, and a predatory superior and others bent on breaking them apart with vicious lies.

Intimate and deeply emotional, this novel explores longing, consent, and redemption, asking whether trust and courageous love can survive in a world designed to tear them down.