

Unrepairable Love / I married a man

Unrepairable Love

Chapter 301

Elizabeth never thought Mark would overhear their conversation. "You were eavesdropping," Elizabeth said, genuinely surprised. Whether it was a coincidence or not, Mark shouldn't have done this; it was a matter of character. Nick was so serious it sent chills down one's spine.

"Mr. York, what did I do wrong? Wasn't I right to report 117?" Mark questioned Nick. "Esme was useless and shouldn't be allowed to stay in our hospital, right? And her!" Mark pointed at Elizabeth. "Why should these useless people work with me?"

Elizabeth frowned. She knew Mark disliked them, but she didn't realize it was this bad.

Nick pointed at Mark. "Calling people useless, what kind of behavior is that?" Nick's face was expressionless. "You're terminated. His jealousy has led to improper conduct, and I've informed the industry to blacklist him!"

Mark's eyes reddened. He clasped his hands together and knelt down with a thud. "Mr. York, I was wrong! I was just confused. Don't do this to me! If you blacklist me, how will I survive?" He had worked so hard to study medicine for so many years. Now he was being blacklisted. How could this be? His life was ruined!

Elizabeth stared at Mark, feeling no pity. Mark had always looked down on them. He deserved this. If Mark couldn't treat his colleagues equally, who knew how he'd treat patients?

Elizabeth suddenly realized why Mark was so enthusiastic about picking up that patient today. Because the patient was from the military. Mark was utterly disgusting.

"Why are you begging? When you were ruining others, did you think you were making a mistake?" Nick glared at Mark.

"What do you mean ruining others? Esme faked her degree. Wasn't it right to report it? How is that a mistake?" Mark shouted and then looked at Elizabeth defiantly. "Elizabeth, tell them yourself, wasn't it you who gave Esme the spot in medical school?"

Alexander looked at Elizabeth in surprise. Everyone knew Esme's degree was fake, but no one knew that her spot was given by Elizabeth.

Elizabeth was stunned for a moment. She really shouldn't have come to watch this drama. Mark kept pushing the topic onto her.

"Dr. Perry, did you give Esme your spot?" Sunny mumbled quietly. "It's said that you bought your way into medical school?" It was widely rumored that the Percy family was a family of doctors, except for Elizabeth, who was considered a medical failure. When Elizabeth got into medical school, everyone said she bought her way in. But when Esme got in, everyone said she earned it!

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Actually, Elizabeth couldn't remember the details very well. Back then, she and Esme were close, and she willingly gave up her spot for Esme. She never thought twice about those things she did for Esme.

"What do you mean bought the spot? If you had checked the records from back then, you would know. The announcement was on the official website!" Mark shouted.

Alexander looked at Elizabeth in disbelief. Elizabeth's expression darkened. "Stop talking."

Ruining Esme was not her intention. She wasn't a saint, but she didn't want to publicize past events. Although her relationship with Esme had soured, her feelings for Esme back then were genuine.

Since Elizabeth didn't want it mentioned, Mark insisted on saying it: Elizabeth was the one who got into medical school. As for Esme, she only got in because she was close to Elizabeth and had Elizabeth give up her spot. Esme knows nothing about medicine! What has Esme done in the cardiothoracic department this year? If she wasn't showing off in the office, she was arguing with patients and family members in the ward! Mark stood up directly.

Since he was already blacklisted, he wasn't afraid of being the bad guy anymore. Alexander looked at Mark with a heavy expression. He didn't interrupt and wanted to hear him out. Actually, he had only recently found out that Esme's degree was fake. Esme only said that her spot was bought, and Elizabeth knew about it. But Alexander didn't know that the spot was given by Elizabeth. So, Elizabeth wasn't really a medical failure but truly capable. Otherwise, she wouldn't have saved Bryan at that banquet!

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Everyone turned to Elizabeth, waiting for her to spill the beans. Especially Alexander; his eyes were practically burning holes into her. Elizabeth glanced around the office, feeling a bit lost for words. She thought, *Should I just say I'm not useless and I gave the spot to Esme?*

"Come on, speak up! Esme treated you like crap. What are you waiting for?" Mark snapped at Elizabeth, his glare intense. "Why are you being so overly nice? Does Esme even care? She took your spot, our man, and keeps coming after you! Elizabeth, are you a doormat?" Mark almost had Elizabeth backed into a corner.

Alexander kept his eyes locked on Elizabeth, his hand slowly clenching into a fist. He was waiting for her to say yes.

"Elizabeth, if you've got something to say, just say it," Nick said calmly. They all had faith in Elizabeth.

Elizabeth looked at Alexander and smiled. "If I say it, will you blame me for hurting your first love?"

For a moment, Alexander was speechless. Elizabeth looked him in the eyes and said, "Yeah, that's right, I gave the spot to Esme."

No matter if Alexander would blame her, Elizabeth was done with holding back. Mark was right; she had put up with enough over the years, hadn't she? What did she get in return for all her patience?

Alexander's face showed a flicker of shock. He frowned, clearly in disbelief.

"Back then, I got into Lisbun Medical School, but I was tight with Ebe. She wanted to go too but couldn't get in. I felt bad and gave her my spot. The dean didn't want me to miss out, so he let both of us in under a two-for-one deal."

Elizabeth was the one who got in, and Esme just tagged along. Mark was spot on. Elizabeth wondered, 'How does he know?'

The office was dead silent. Elizabeth had always thought she'd have to clear her name someday, but she didn't expect it to be in the hospital office.

Alexander, unmoved, his voice dry, said, "Why didn't you say it before?"

"Say what? That Loton got into medical school because I brought her in?" Elizabeth looked at Alexander and chuckled. "You never asked, so what was I supposed to say? Besides..."

Elizabeth suddenly paused. Alexander stared straight at her.

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Elizabeth smiled. Had she said it, would you have believed her? Later, Esme would act all sweet and say Elizabeth was the less intelligent one. Alexander would believe Esme in a heartbeat, wouldn't he?

Alexander suddenly choked up. The vibe in the office was a bit...eerie. Amanda and Nick exchanged a look and then glanced at each other. So, Elizabeth had been through a lot over the years, huh? Nick thought about Elizabeth's medical skills and felt pissed that he was called useless. Elizabeth was the real deal. She was so capable, yet she put up with all that crap. Elizabeth was on a whole different level.

"The annually cut," Mark suddenly laughed. Zbeni vodu back again. One dents mod in one don't of Elizabeth, shaking his head. Elizabeth, being good to others only works... Elizabeth wed... Mark earned and liberated a cry. He really despised these...

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Mark busted his butt studying medicine for years, grinding nonstop, and finally landed a spot at this hospital on his own merit. But for Esme and Elizabeth? Their families just had to drop a few words, and boom, they were in.

Not only that, when Esme first started at the hospital, she was Mark's apprentice. He couldn't even give her a piece of his mind, while she gave him attitude every single day. Six months flew by, and Esme hadn't learned squat.

During an evaluation, his bosses even chewed him out. What was he supposed to do?

Mark shook his head, feeling like life was just a cruel joke. As Mark was about to leave, Elizabeth called out, “Dr. Fisher,” with a sincere tone. Mark paused for a second. He sighed, didn't say a word, and slowly took off his white coat. Underneath, he was rocking a plain white T-shirt. Elizabeth watched as Mark fixed his hair and then clenched his hand. His back was as straight as his pride.

Elizabeth glanced at the others in the office. Nick frowned and said to Alexander, “Mr. Tudor, I can't back Esme anymore.” By now, everyone in the hospital knew Esme had faked her credentials. Getting Esme to quit on her own was the best move.

Alexander glanced at Elizabeth. He saw the cold indifference in her eyes. Elizabeth seemed to have checked out of this mess a long time ago, but Alexander remembered when Elizabeth got into med school; she was so pumped and said she wanted to treat him to a meal. The next day, she vanished, and when they met again, Elizabeth said, “Alexander, I lied. I didn't get into med school.” Turns out, Elizabeth had given her spot to Esme.

Thinking about it, Alexander felt a pang in his heart. “Mr. York,” Alexander called to Nick. Nick nodded. “Yeah?”

Handle Esme however you see fit. No need to go easy.” Then, Alexander looked at Elizabeth. “It'd be best to coordinate with the med school and issue a statement for Ms. Perry to clear things up.” Alexander hadn't finished speaking when Elizabeth cut in, “No need,”

Alexander frowned. “You don't want to tell everyone you're not a failure?”

“I've gotten used to that label,” Elizabeth smiled. “Actually, it was kinda funny.”

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Alexander was silent for a few seconds. He raised an eyebrow and finally decided to let Elizabeth be. But as for Esme, “No leniency. That was Alexander's final word.

Elizabeth couldn't help but wonder, *Does Alexander even know what love is? Love is tolerance, favoritism, and unconditional protection. Alexander*

doesn't help Esme smooth things over or save her. He even says no leniency? Alexander really doesn't know how to love.

Elizabeth shook her head and said nothing. As she was about to leave, there was a dull thud from outside the open window of the office. Sunny leaned out the window to see what the noise was. The next second, chaos erupted downstairs. Immediately, Sunny screamed too. The piercing scream grabbed everyone's attention.

Amanda was annoyed. "What's all the screaming about?" Sunny turned around with a stiff face, her complexion instantly pale. She opened her mouth and whispered, "Jumped... dead."

"What?" Amanda walked over, annoyed with Sunny's unclear words. Amanda looked down, and when she saw the scene, she instantly turned around. Amanda swallowed and looked at everyone, saying, "Mark jumped off the building."

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Elizabeth's heart dropped like a rock, and she rushed to the window to peek down. The white was getting drenched in bright red. Even in his last moments, Mark clung to his work badge. It hit Elizabeth why Mark had ditched his lab coat earlier. Never. It was his pride and joy, and he wouldn't let anyone mess with it, not even himself. He could get dirty, but his lab coat? Never.

Elizabeth gulped, her hands slowly balling into fists, and then she turned to leave. Alexander frowned and trailed after her. Elizabeth headed downstairs. The security guards were already setting up a perimeter. The emergency doctors rushed over, but soon they were shaking their heads at each other. Someone eventually covered Mark with a white sheet.

Elizabeth watched the scene, stumbling back a step. Suddenly, she felt a hand on her waist. She turned her head, met Alexander's eyes, then quickly looked away. She took a couple of steps forward to put some space between them.

"Is that Dr. Fisher?"

"Dr. Fisher actually jumped?"

"What went down? I heard Dr. Fisher wrote the report. Is that true?"

Elizabeth crossed her arms and covered her mouth with one hand, her eyes wide with disbelief. Mark had actually jumped. This was the last thing Elizabeth saw coming. But she forgot how proud Mark was. Losing his doctor status left him with no choice but to end it all.

Elizabeth bit her lip, her brows furrowed like they were stuck that way.

“Elizabeth, you good?” Alexander asked, worried.

Elizabeth shook her head, signaling she was fine.

“Talk to Esme and comfort her,” Elizabeth told Alexander. Though, Esme would never jump. Next up was notifying the family, the cops getting involved, and the hospital dealing with the body.

By the time Elizabeth got home, it was already the middle of the night. She lay in bed, her mind a mess, filled with the image of Mark lying in a pool of blood.

Elizabeth sighed and sat up in bed. She grabbed her phone from the nightstand and opened Instagram. Sure enough, the incident was trending. After all, Mark was the deputy director of cardiothoracic surgery. Reaching that spot was a big deal.

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Elizabeth read the comments and saw that Mark was actually well-liked by netizens. Many people said Mark had a great attitude, and some even praised his medical skills. Elizabeth closed Instagram, not wanting to look anymore. The more she looked, the more frustrated she got.

Elizabeth propped herself up, and in her Facebook racing group, messages were blowing up. Elizabeth clicked in and found a bunch of racers holed up in the middle of the night, planning a race.

Unable to sleep, Elizabeth changed clothes and headed out. As she went downstairs, she ran into Declan drinking water. “Where you off to this late?”

“Oh, nowhere,” Elizabeth brushed him off and left.

Amber Road. The racers had already started a race. Elizabeth wore a mask, a black hoodie, and a hat. At a glance, it was hard to tell it was her.

“Sign up here if you wanna race next lap,” someone called out.

Elizabeth walked over silently and said, "I'm signing up."

The person looked Elizabeth up and down and said, "A woman?"

"Yeah, so what?" Elizabeth shot back.

The person laughed and replied, "Nothing. Just don't cry if you lose."

Elizabeth hated hearing that crap. The stereotype of women always seemed to be "couldn't handle it" or "would cry if they lost." Today's women were tough and didn't cry at the first sign of trouble. Everyone knew that while venting was okay, crying didn't solve problems.

Elizabeth signed a word: Pig. Then she signed the safety notice. Just as Elizabeth finished signing up, a guy wearing a baseball cap came up behind her.

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The dude was rocking a black tracksuit, looking slick as hell. He scribbled his name: Shawn. "Alright, y'all hang tight for the next round," the guy in charge called out.

Elizabeth was warming up, and Shawn Simmons was chilling right next to her. Elizabeth kept sneaking peeks at Shawn. His head was down, hat covering half his face. But man, that high nose bridge and those sexy lips? Even without seeing his eyes, you knew he was a looker.

Just as Shawn lifted his head, Elizabeth ducked hers to stretch. They totally missed each other's gaze.

Soon enough, the race kicked off. Elizabeth had snagged a green race car. There were four racers in total. The Amber Road track was just as gnarly as Eaglecrest Mountain. It really put your skills and experience to the test.

The racers who had just finished were grumbling nearby, "A chick's taking too?" "Yeah, haven't seen a female racer in ages. Last one was Steve." "Without Steve, these races are kinda dull," another dude chimed in. Everyone cracked up. "What can you do? Steve's gone AWOL, no one can find her."

As they chatted, the race started. Elizabeth's green car shot out like a bat outta hell. Everyone was like, "Whoa, so aggressive?" "Looks like she's got some attitude." "She's leaving everyone in the dust."

While the others started off smooth, Elizabeth floored it right from the get-go. The folks in the cars behind her were cursing, “Damn it!” The track was long, and early on, everyone was just showing off their skills, waiting to make their move later. But Elizabeth had totally thrown off their groove.

Soon, a blue car caught up. I glanced over; it was Shawn, the guy who’d been stretching next to her earlier. He still showed a side profile, but you could tell he had long lashes and was super handsome. Elizabeth hoped this Shawn would give her a run for her money! So she hit the gas.

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Sure enough, Shawn didn't let her down and kept up. The two quickly took the lead, becoming the stars of the track. Their race was wild, with one chasing the other, drifting and showing off mad skills!

The S-curve was Elizabeth’s jam. She loved gunning it through the S-curve; it was thrilling and tricky to handle. But today, Elizabeth held back. To her shock, Shawn sped through the S-curve.

At this point, the other racers were floored. “Holy crap. That’s Steve’s signature move!” “Who is that guy?” “So damn handsome!”

Elizabeth frowned, thinking, *He knows my signature move?* Elizabeth quickly hit the gas to catch up, thinking about the person who had texted her. Elizabeth didn’t dare to speed up because the technique was too familiar, and it would blow her cover. But Shawn knew it, so it should be cool for her to speed up, right?

Stow glanced back and saw Elizabeth’s car lagging. He smirked. No one could beat him, except Steve! But next second, Elizabeth floored it and was about to overtake him. She deliberately taunted him, and zoomed past.

Shawn was stunned and pondered. There’s a sharp turn ahead. If she keeps this up, she might not make it and could tumble down. Elizabeth, concentrating on racing, gripped the steering wheel with a determined expression.

While everyone was in awe, Elizabeth pulled off a series of sick drifts through the turn. “Holy crap, amazing!” The ticurs even stood up and cheered. Shawn in the blue car was undoubtedly starstruck.

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Two cars tore down Amber Road, swapping spots like it was a game of cat and mouse. Elizabeth was seriously pissed today, so she was driving like a maniac. But, honestly, her skills had gotten a bit rusty over the years. This blue car had Elizabeth all hyped up. Way more fun than that lume race on Eaglecrest Mountain. At least this Shawn dude seemed like a real challenge.

The blue car pulled up next to Elizabeth's ride again. The GPS showed the finish line was just around the corner. Elizabeth bit her lip, gripped the wheel tighter, and shot a glance at the other car. Right then, Shawn looked over too. Elizabeth caught a glimpse of his eyes.

In the next second, his car shot ahead. Elizabeth's eyes narrowed, and she floored it to keep up. As they closed in on the finish line, things got wild. The crowd was going nuts, cheering as the two cars almost crossed the line at the same time.

"Who won?"

"Man, it looked like a tie. Did anyone catch who won?"

"This is driving me crazy."

The spectators were buzzing, dying to know who took the win. Elizabeth parked her car, breathing hard. She leaned back in her seat. She contemplated confronting Alexander with the evidence to show she wasn't a loser, and using two million bucks to embarrass Henry. Elizabeth felt a surge of satisfaction. After being held back for so long, she finally felt free!

Elizabeth pulled her hoodie down low and slipped away from the Amber Road race scene. By the time Shawn from the blue car showed up, Elizabeth's car was already empty. He looked around, trying to spot Elizabeth, but she was nowhere to be found.

Shawn glanced up at the big screen and saw Elizabeth's car on it. Elizabeth had won.

The next morning, Elizabeth got up early and did some yoga stretches. Her hair was thrown up in a messy bun, and she wore some comfy clothes as she ate breakfast and watched the news downstairs. She looked totally refreshed.

“You’re in a good mood today?” Declan was shocked when he saw Elizabeth coming downstairs.

Elizabeth raised an eyebrow and greeted him, “Morning, Dad.”

Rose, who was trailing behind, was also stunned. So full of energy?

“What got into you?” Declan was worried about Elizabeth.

Elizabeth bit into her sandwich, giving Declan a knowing look and thinking, “What could have gotten into me? I sorted out a ton of stuff yesterday, and now I feel totally free.”

“I saw the news about your department’s deputy director jumping off a building yesterday. Did it get to you?” Rose peeled an egg and asked Elizabeth.

Elizabeth shook her head and replied, “Nope, I’m good.”

“Mom, Dad, don’t worry. From today on, I’m living for myself!” Elizabeth declared with conviction.

Rose coughed, choking on her egg. Was Elizabeth serious?

Declan pursed his lips. Anyway, he figured Elizabeth would forget what she said soon enough.

Elizabeth was annoyed. “Mom, Dad, what’s with those looks?”

“We trust you. Okay, no time to waste in the morning. Get on with what you gotta do.” Rose finished her glass of milk, rinsed her mouth quickly, and headed to work.

Elizabeth was speechless and silently looked at Declan.

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Declan laughed and said, “Hey, once you’ve got it sorted, come claim the inheritance early. I’m ready to hit the road for a trip.”

Elizabeth was stunned and mused, “I’m working on it now. Can they just trust me for once?” She sighed, got ready, and headed to work.

On the way, her phone buzzed. It was Joseph. “Hey, a killer movie just dropped. Wanna catch it tonight?”

Elizabeth raised an eyebrow. “Sure, I’m down.”

Joseph was a bit taken aback by her quick response. “Cool, I’ll pick you up after work.”

“Alright.” She hung up.

The weather was perfect today, clear skies all around.

At the hospital, Elizabeth had just stepped into the cardiothoracic department when Sunny called out, “Dr. Percy, Ms. Carter wants you in the conference room ASAP.”

“Got it.” Elizabeth nodded, threw on her lab coat, and headed to the meeting. She tied her hair up, hands in her pockets, strolling down the hallway. Everyone noticed something different about her today.

“Did you hear? Dr. Percy isn’t useless.”

“Of course not. She’s been here forever. You know what she can do.”

“Yeah, remember that patient who went into cardiac arrest? Dr. Percy saved them.”

“She’s from a family of doctors. She’s definitely not useless. Let’s cut the gossip and head to the meeting. Lots going on lately!”

Elizabeth pushed open the conference room door. Everyone was already there, waiting for her.

“Sorry, didn’t know there was a meeting today,” she said.

Amanda pointed to her seat, signaling her to sit.

Amanda started the meeting, “As you all know, there’s been some drama in the hospital lately. We have two things to discuss. First, the hospital is cracking down on credential theft. From now on, hiring will be stricter. But trust the hospital; if a doctor is here, there’s a reason. Some might seem unremarkable but are actually top-notch.” She glanced at Elizabeth. This point was specifically requested by Nick for all departments to read.

Elizabeth was fiddling with her fingers, head down.

Amanda continued, "Second, the hospital cares about everyone's mental health. So, we're offering free mental health check-ups and \$1,000 in medical funds for each person."

Everyone clapped, clearly pleased.

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Nothing beats free check-ups and extra cash.

Amanda got serious, "Regarding the Mark incident, the hospital deeply regrets it. We hope it never happens again. Also, Esmer Russell has been fired and blacklisted for credential theft."

Elizabeth finally looked up.

Being blacklisted meant Esme's career was toast. Alexander really didn't hold back on Esme.

"Does Esme know?" Elizabeth asked.

In the ward, Esme lay on the bed, pale as a ghost. Allen sighed at her bedside. "Esme, you need to focus on getting better. Everything else can wait, got it?"

Esme stayed silent.

"What's going on with you and Alexander now? He's divorced Elizabeth, so has he said when he'll marry you?" Allen pressed.

Esme tearfully replied, "No."

"I think you and Alexander are done! Tomorrow I'll set you up with someone new. Go on a date and stop messing around with him," Allen said angrily, "You're a Russell. When have you ever been treated like this?"

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"Nah, Mom, I only wanna marry Alexander!" Esme shook her head vehemently. "This lifetime, it's Alexander or bust. I'm gonna make him fall for me and marry me, no matter what."

“Whatever,” Allen snorted. She grabbed her bag and said, “Got stuff to do today. I’m out. If you’re hungry, ask the housekeeper to fix you something.” And with that, Allen bounced.

Esme watched her leave, feeling a heavy pit in her stomach. Sure, the Russell family treated her well, but she often felt like something was missing, like real, deep love. Just like now; she’d been through so much, and all Allen did was say a few comforting words and then split. Is this what family love is like in rich families? Are all families like this? she wondered.

Allen left the ward and let out a big sigh. She had no clue what to do with Esme. If Esme liked some regular guy, the Russell family could just throw their weight around and make him marry her. But she had a thing for Alexander, and the Russell family had no pull with the Tudor family.

Allen headed downstairs and saw Elizabeth coming in as she exited the elevator. Elizabeth looked on point today, standing tall with her elegant neck and shoulders. She was checking out some medical records, looking all serious, which was kinda hot.

The elevator stopped on the fourth floor, and Elizabeth got out. Allen found herself following Elizabeth without even thinking about it. Elizabeth went to the consultation desk, chatting with a couple of nurses, smiling here and there, looking all gentle and composed. Allen just stood there watching until Elizabeth turned and caught her staring.

Elizabeth frowned inwardly. ‘Why’s Allen eyeballing me?’ Busted, Allen quickly cleared her throat, grabbed her bag, and strutted off like she owned the place. Elizabeth was left there, totally confused.

Elizabeth got back to work, while Allen found a spot where Elizabeth couldn’t see her and kept sneaking glances. Weird. It’s like something’s pulling me to look at Elizabeth, Allen thought. She remembered their arguments and felt a twinge of regret. But then she frowned again and wondered, Why am I feeling bad? Elizabeth upset Esme, so I had every right to chew her out. Ugh, so annoying! Allen quickly left.

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Elizabeth pinched her nose and sneezed. She looked around; everyone was busy, but she still felt like something was off, though she couldn’t put her finger on it. Elizabeth shook her head.

At the end of the day, Elizabeth saw Joseph at the hospital entrance. Joseph was rocking a white shirt and glasses, looking all gentle and fine. Elizabeth walked over, and he pulled out a bouquet of roses from the car. "For you."

Elizabeth was totally surprised. "Does watching a movie count as a date?" Joseph suddenly asked. Elizabeth looked up, clutching the flowers. "It's just a normal thing friends do, right?"

Joseph smiled and said, "Sure, whatever you say." Elizabeth hadn't moved on from her last relationship, so Joseph was cool with waiting until she was ready. On the way, Joseph and Elizabeth chatted about hospital stuff. Elizabeth seemed pretty chill, and Joseph figured it didn't bother her much. So he didn't push it.

The cinema was packed, and Joseph got the tickets and bought some snacks for Elizabeth.

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Elizabeth hadn't been to a movie in forever; the last time was when she'd landed a role in one. Today's flick was a rom-com, and the place was packed with lovey-dovey couples. Elizabeth and Joseph snagged seats in the back row. Right next to them, a couple was all over each other.

"I know a killer rooftop spot. Wanna check it out after the movie?" Joseph leaned in close.

Elizabeth nodded. "Sure thing."

Joseph grinned. "Sweet."

Elizabeth couldn't help but steal a glance at Joseph; he was a total sweetheart. But she just wasn't feeling that spark. It didn't seem fair to keep stringing Joseph along.

Elizabeth sighed. She tried to chill and not overthink it. But halfway through the movie, things got steamy on screen, and the theater vibe followed suit. She could actually hear the couple next to her making out.

Elizabeth bit her lip and peeked to her right. Yep, they were going at it. She stuffed some snacks in her mouth. When she looked forward again, she spotted another couple smooching in the far right corner.

Elizabeth rolled her eyes and mused, “Man, my eyesight is too good!”

“I haven’t been to the movies in ages. Is it always like this now?” Elizabeth whispered to Joseph.

Joseph looked a bit awkward. “Honestly, I haven’t been to the movies in a long time either.”

They shared a look and burst out laughing.

“Suddenly, I feel like I don’t get romance anymore,” Elizabeth sighed.

“Elizabeth, you gotta love yourself first. Romance or not, it’s all about how you see it,” Joseph said gently.

Elizabeth found herself staring into Joseph’s eyes. In the dim theater, Joseph’s eyes were full of patience and affection. Joseph’s so steady and sweet. But why don’t I feel that spark? she wondered.

“Did you hear me?” Joseph asked.

Elizabeth mumbled, “Yeah, I did.”

Joseph was right; romance was all about perspective.

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Like the couple next to them: If you looked at it weirdly, it was awkward. But with a softer eye, it was just young love. Watching a movie and making out in the theater—wasn’t that kinda brave and romantic?

“Thanks. I learned a lot,” Elizabeth told Joseph.

Joseph smiled.

After the movie, they headed to the rooftop restaurant Joseph had mentioned. The place was in the heart of the city, right by the river. The view was lit, with cruise ships gliding by. It was Elizabeth’s first time there, and she was pretty impressed. They took the elevator up to the rooftop terrace.

“Is this place always this romantic?” Elizabeth asked, a bit puzzled. She held her limited-edition bag in one hand and touched a fresh rose on the railing with the other.

“This decor,” Joseph was also surprised. Usually, the place had a chill, green vibe. But today, it was decked out with flowers, balloons, and streamers. What was up?

A waiter led them to their seats. Joseph asked, “Why’s the decor so fancy today? Something special going on?”

The waiter grinned. “Someone’s proposing tonight.”

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Joseph handed the menu to Elizabeth and started chatting with the waiter. “Man, this place has some serious style,” he commented. “So romantic.”

The waiter, with a straight face, spilled the beans. “Yeah, and this time, it’s the girl doing the proposing!”

Joseph’s jaw dropped. “A girl proposing? That’s gutsy!”

Elizabeth perked up at the waiter’s words. So, a girl was proposing. Not that shocking, really. Times had changed, and plenty of bold girls were out there wearing their hearts on their sleeves. People were more chill about stuff now; if it worked out, awesome. If not, no biggie.

Elizabeth finished her order and let Joseph take his turn. “I’ll have what she’s having,” Joseph said, handing the menu back to the waiter with a smile. “Thanks.”

Elizabeth watched Joseph closely. He was always super nice to everyone. Even the waiter received gentle treatment. Feeling a bit bored, she snapped a picture and threw it up on Instagram: *Movie night and dinner. Feeling alive again.*

Comments started rolling in almost immediately. Elizabeth skimmed through a few; most were telling her to steer clear of guys and just enjoy life. She liked each comment, letting her fans know she saw them.

The waiter soon brought their food. Elizabeth was cutting into her steak when she overheard a waiter outside say, “Are they here? Okay, we’re setting up.”

The place was buzzing tonight, and everyone was hyped about the proposal. Elizabeth's seat was prime real estate for the show; in front of her, rose petals were laid out in a heart shape.

Just as Elizabeth was getting excited, two familiar faces walked in. Elizabeth's hand froze, and the knife slipped onto the tablecloth. Joseph looked just as shocked. He swore he had no clue that tonight's proposal was between Esme and Alexander.

Esme was leading Alexander, her hands over his eyes, guiding him step by step. Alexander, all suited up, was playing along and moving his feet. Esme took her hands away from Alexander's eyes. Alexander frowned and instinctively shut his eyes. A big screen lit up in front of him, so bright he had to squint.

After a moment, Alexander finally opened his eyes. On the screen, Esme was holding a camera and saying, "Hey, Alexander, it's Esme. Today marks who-knows-how-many days since we met. Looking back, I've always been by your side as a friend. You support me, care for me, love me, and give me everything. I'm so grateful. So now, let me take you through the years with the photos I've taken of you!"

The screen started showing photos of Alexander over the years: high school Alexander, college Alexander, and Alexander taking over the Tudor Group at its press conference. In one shot, Alexander's eyes were clearly on Esme.

Alexander had taken over the Tudor Group before he even graduated. At the press conference, Elizabeth was there as his fiancée. But in the crowd, his first love, Esme, was also there.

Watching the video, Elizabeth increasingly felt like a third wheel in Alexander and Esme's story all these years. If it weren't for her, they would have been the perfect couple.

Elizabeth gripped her knife and fork tightly, kept her head down, and ate in silence. Joseph frowned and said, "Let's bounce and find another spot to eat."