

## Hidden Disasters

Daphne stood at the counter of the pharmacy, peering at the labels of boxes as she prepared to stock the shelves. She was the sole employee in the small pharmacy. She thought she could busy herself with some work that didn't require heavy thinking. She spent most of her days trying to avoid any heavy thinking or self reflection. She couldn't face her inconsistent, scattered thoughts. Instead, she opted to add price labels to items and place them on shelves. Daphne, lost in her own little world, failed to hear the sound of the door opening.

"Hello, is anyone here?" called out the young girl who stood near the doorway. Startled, Daphne dropped a box of cold medicine on the floor.

"Yes, I'll be there in a moment," Daphne called back out while she picked up the box and sat it on the shelf. As she walked to the front of the store, she tried to place the familiar voice, but she couldn't place it with a face. When she reached the counter, she saw the same girl who had been in the pharmacy nearly a month earlier. The brunette and Daphne had had a long talk. Well, mostly Daphne talked while the girl listened and cried. She hoped that she wasn't back for the same horrid reason. After doing a quick once over, she had all the confirmation she needed. The girl was wearing sunglasses, a scarf and a long sleeve shirt on a smothering August evening.

"I was hoping I would find you here Ms. Daphne," she said softly with a quick glance at Daphne as she shifted her weight on her feet and played with her left sleeve.

"Hey, Aubrey. What can I get you?" Daphne asked gently, trying to play the oblivious role.

With a slow inhale and sigh, Aubrey answered, "You were right. I didn't want you to be, but you were. Lord, were you right." Aubrey's sleeves rolled up as she reached for her

sunglasses and scarf, leaving her arms and face exposed. Daphne made an effort not to gasp as she took in the discoloration and swelling of Aubrey's skin. Daphne cleared her throat to try and get rid of the knot in her throat.

"I wish I wasn't so right. What are you going to do?" asked Daphne with concern laced in her voice.

"What I have to do. What you told me to do a month when you led me to the aisle with first aid materials and warned me that it wouldn't be a one time thing. I have to leave him. I can't live like this." Daphne recognized the grief and determination on Aubrey's face and nodded.

"That's the best thing for you to do. Do you have anywhere to go?"

"I was thinking of going back home, but my dad will explode if he sees me like this. I just want to move past this with no more yelling or violence. I brought a train ticket so I can go and stay with my best friend from college," Aubrey responded with a fond smile as she thought of her parents and her best friend.

"I'm sure you'll find the peace and happiness that you deserve," Daphne replied with a gentle shoulder squeeze and a strong smile.

"I wanted to come see you before I left the city and thank you. Your story gave me just what I needed. It may have seemed like I wasn't listening, but I was. Your survival makes me feel that I can survive and come out stronger," Aubrey admitted to Daphne with a spark in her blue eyes. Daphne's smile slightly twitched and lessened before she could stop herself, but Aubrey didn't notice. She took a step back from Aubrey as she tugged a loose lock of hair behind her ears.

“The best part of experiencing something damaging and surviving is being able to live to tell the story and help others. I’m happy I could help you,” she said as she began nervously twisting her wedding ring around her finger. Aubrey looked down at the wedding ring in admiration.

“I just hope I can have my happily ever after with someone else like you did,” Aubrey glanced at the clock on the wall and continued, “Well, I better see myself off before I miss my train.” Aubrey and Daphne hugged tightly. After they released each other, Aubrey put back on her sunglasses and scarf, said her final goodbye, and left the pharmacy.

Daphne watched her go with a sense of happiness and pride. She was proud of Aubrey’s strength and was happy that she would be in a safer place. She hated herself for her other lingering feelings of envy and guilt that she couldn’t deny. She let herself feel envious for a half of a minute before she swallowed it down. She stomped on her guilty conscience. She didn’t need to feel guilty for lying if it resulted in saving the life of a young girl. She wished she had had someone like herself a decade ago when she was Aubrey’s age.

Aubrey didn’t know that the survival story that she had been fed a month ago was a fantasy that Daphne kept clenched in her imagination. Aubrey didn’t know that Daphne’s marriage wasn’t so perfect. Aubrey didn’t know about her weekly flower delivery and expensive gift combo that had the same worthless and insincere note “Sorry” attached to them. Aubrey didn’t know about the heavy makeup Daphne wore to cover her own bruises. Aubrey didn’t know that Daphne’s abusive ex wasn’t truly an ex. Aubrey didn’t know that by escaping, she was living out Daphne’s biggest desire. Aubrey would never know that Daphne wasn’t living happily ever after with the perfect husband.