**Daisy**

**John sat in his small, minimalist living room, his heart weighed down by an unbearable blend of guilt and determination. The photo in his hands was one of Daisy, taken five years earlier. She had been glowing with health, her radiant smile lighting up the frame as she posed on a hiking trail. Now, her once-bright eyes were dulled by despair, her body weighed down by emotional and physical lethargy.**

**Since her boyfriend left her a year ago, Daisy had spiraled. At 5'4" and 190 pounds, she was far from her ideal weight of 150, and her health was declining rapidly. She spent her days in sweatpants, surrounded by bags of Doritos and bottles of Mountain Dew. Her doctor had warned her that she was on the brink of diabetes, and yet she brushed it off with a shrug. John had tried everything—gentle conversations, emotional pleas, even heated arguments. Nothing worked. Daisy had shut him out, as if her world outside the couch no longer mattered.**

**John looked out the window, the streetlights casting long shadows on the empty sidewalk. He had made his decision. It wasn’t one he took lightly, and he knew it would come at a cost. But doing nothing felt like watching her sink in quicksand while holding a rope he refused to throw. He wasn’t going to let his sister slip away.**

**Trey, his oldest and most trusted friend, showed up that night wearing a ski mask. They had rehearsed this plan until John’s stomach churned from the sheer audacity of it. Daisy would be upset—furious even. But wasn’t her life worth a little anger? John clenched his fists as they entered her house quietly, stepping over crinkled snack bags strewn across the floor. Daisy lay sprawled on the couch, her face slack in sleep. Trey injected the sedative gently into her arm, and she barely stirred as they carried her out.**

**When Daisy woke, her head throbbed. The room was unfamiliar—simple but comfortable, with a twin bed, a bathroom in the corner, a small table, and a TV mounted on the wall. The walls were painted a soothing shade of blue, but the locked door across from her chilled her blood. She threw herself at it, pounding and screaming until her throat was raw.**

**The TV flickered on, the face of a masked man appearing on the screen. “Daisy,” the distorted voice began, calm but unyielding, “you are here because you need help. You’ve been given everything you need to live comfortably—nutritious meals, a bathroom, and time to focus on your health. This isn’t punishment; it’s a second chance.”**

**“What the hell is this?” Daisy shouted, panic rising in her chest. “You can’t just lock me up like this! Let me out!”**

**“This will end when you are healthy,” the voice continued. “For now, cooperate, and this will go more smoothly.”**

**The screen went dark. Daisy felt the first tremors of fear give way to anger. Whoever these people were, they had no right to do this to her. But her pounding on the door and screaming brought no results. Hours later, a tray slid through a slot in the door. On it was a bowl of vibrant salad: kale, roasted sweet potatoes, chickpeas, and a creamy tahini dressing. Daisy stared at it in disbelief. Where were her chips? Her soda? She shoved the tray aside and fumed.**

**By the next morning, hunger had worn her resolve thin. She picked at the salad grudgingly, discovering that it wasn’t as bad as she’d expected, though it didn’t satisfy the deep cravings clawing at her insides. Over the next few days, similar meals arrived: fluffy quinoa with roasted vegetables and a drizzle of lemon, hearty lentil stew, and even a bowl of oatmeal topped with fresh fruit and a dollop of almond butter. The flavors were vibrant, the portions generous, but Daisy’s defiance remained. She ate only enough to stave off hunger, clinging to her anger like a shield.**

**Her resolve was tested further when the masked man appeared at her door with a rope. “Time for exercise,” he said flatly.**

**Daisy scoffed. “You’ve got to be kidding me.”**

**The man didn’t respond. He tied the rope around her waist and led her outside to a wide-open field. A four-wheeler waited there, its engine humming softly. Without ceremony, he attached the other end of the rope to the vehicle.**

**“Run,” he said.**

**Daisy refused to budge, planting her feet in the dirt. The four-wheeler inched forward, tugging her along until she finally relented, jogging awkwardly behind it. Sweat dripped down her face, her breaths coming in gasps. The humiliation burned almost as much as her legs. By the time the session ended, she collapsed onto the bed in her room, aching and exhausted.**

**Each day, the routine repeated: three meals, each a colorful array of plant-based dishes; grueling runs that left her muscles screaming; and long, lonely nights in her room. Daisy’s anger didn’t fade easily. She screamed at the masked man, hurled insults at the TV when the distorted voice spoke, and cried into her pillow when no one could hear her.**

**But something began to change. By the end of the first week, the bloating she had lived with for months was gone. Her stomach, no longer weighed down by heavy, processed food, felt lighter. The meals she begrudgingly consumed started to sustain her in a way junk food never had. Her energy, though depleted after exercise, was steadier during the day. She hated admitting it, even to herself, but her body was changing.**

**In the mirror, she began to notice subtle shifts. Her face, once puffy, was slimming down. Her skin, previously dull, took on a healthy glow. But Daisy pushed these thoughts aside, refusing to acknowledge anything positive about her captivity. Instead, she spent hours fantasizing about escape, dreaming up plans that always crumbled under the reality of her locked room and the ever-watchful eye of her captors.**

**By the third week, Daisy was running faster, her legs carrying her farther than she thought possible. Trey had added resistance bands and bodyweight exercises to her routine. She hated the workouts, but there was a strange satisfaction in completing them. Her muscles ached, but it was the ache of progress.**

**The solitude forced her to confront emotions she had buried beneath chips and soda. Memories of her ex-boyfriend surfaced—his voice, the way he had left her, the pain that had consumed her. For the first time, she allowed herself to sit with the hurt instead of numbing it with snacks. She cried freely, her tears soaking into the pillow. The release was painful, but it felt like an unraveling, a loosening of the tight knot inside her chest.**

**As the weeks turned into a month, Daisy’s resentment softened. She didn’t stop complaining about the workouts or dreaming about pizza, but there was a quiet shift in her demeanor. The meals, though still vegan, became something she looked forward to. Creamy bowls of coconut curry, baked sweet potatoes topped with spiced lentils, and even treats like dark chocolate truffles made her feel cared for in a strange way.**

**She began to push herself during the workouts, surprising even Trey. She ran harder, longer, and with more determination. Each session left her drenched in sweat but filled with a deep, undeniable sense of accomplishment.**

**By the eighth week, Daisy stepped onto the scale and stared at the number: 155 pounds. Her heart pounded as she blinked, unsure if she was seeing it correctly. She had lost 35 pounds. Tears sprang to her eyes as she stared at her reflection in the bathroom mirror. Her cheekbones were more defined, her body leaner, her posture straighter. She touched her face as if to confirm that it was real.**

**That night, the door to her room unlocked. Daisy stepped out cautiously, her heart hammering in her chest. Trey, still masked, handed her a tablet. The screen flickered to life, and John’s face appeared. His eyes were red-rimmed, his expression raw with emotion.**

**“Daisy,” he began, his voice trembling, “if you’re seeing this, it means you made it. I know you’re probably furious with me, and I can’t blame you. But I couldn’t sit back and watch you destroy yourself. I love you too much to let that happen.”**

**Daisy’s chest tightened as tears streamed down her face. “John,” she whispered, her voice breaking.**

**“I know this was extreme, and I know I’ve hurt you,” John continued, “but I had to do something. I just want my sister back.”**

**The video ended, leaving Daisy staring at the blank screen. Slowly, Trey removed his mask, revealing a kind, apologetic face. “Your brother loves you,” he said simply.**

**When Daisy walked into John’s house the next day, her emotions were a storm. She yelled, cried, and finally collapsed into his arms. “You’re an idiot,” she sobbed, “but you saved me.”**

**Months later, Daisy crossed the finish line of her first 5K, her heart bursting with pride. John was waiting at the end, cheering louder than anyone. She hugged him tightly, her eyes sparkling with life. For the first time in years, she felt like herself again. And though the journey had been painful, she was grateful for every step.**