

CLARISSA

Between Light and Taboo

Novella

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PROLOG – NonTox

The club was almost empty.

Only a few strands of afternoon light fell through the tall windows, dust drifting in the rhythm of the music. It was 2 p.m., and the city outside was bright, while inside everything smelled like night — like alcohol, like bodies, like stories no one wanted to tell.

I sat at the bar, drinking water, waiting for nothing.
Then she appeared.

Shaved head, beautiful, dangerous.

A face like a provocation, a body like a decision. She wore dark technical clothing, heavy boots, headphones around her neck — as if music were her shield. In her eyes was that expression of someone reinventing every second — somewhere between light and taboo.

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“You look like you’re bored,” she said.
I smiled. “Maybe.”

“Then come with me.”

No smile, no flirt — just a command that sounded like an invitation.

We stepped outside, into the harsh afternoon light, crossed the street, passed a kiosk that smelled of coffee and gasoline. Her apartment was in an old building, third floor, high ceilings, open windows, paint everywhere, books, music gear, chaos.

She dropped her bag on the floor, turned to me, and looked straight at me.

“You want to sleep with me, don’t you?”

I stayed silent.

“Don’t bother,” she said. “I’m a lesbian. Men are a taboo for me.”

Then she laughed — not mocking, but free.
And in that laugh was something that held me:

Not desire, but curiosity.
Not closeness, but the promise of a story.

1 – The Week After

The days after our first meeting felt strangely shifted, as if Clarissa had tied an invisible thread to my everyday life. I didn’t think of her consciously, but she was there — like an echo you only notice once it falls silent.

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I saw her again on Monday.

Not planned. Not arranged.

I walked into NonTox, this time in the early evening, and she was already sitting at the bar, a vodka lime in front of her, her legs pulled up as if she were holding herself.

“You again,” she said without looking up.

It sounded neither surprised nor annoyed — more like a statement she accepted before she understood it.

I sat down beside her.

“I was nearby.”

“No one is ‘nearby’ this club by accident,” she said. “You come here because you’re looking for something. Or because you’re trying to avoid something.”

I didn’t know what to say to that.
She looked at me — assessing, but not hostile.

“You seem different from last week,” she said.
“How?”
“Less... expectant.”

I had to smile.
Maybe she was right.

On Wednesday she wrote to me for the first time.
Just one sentence: “*I’m in the park. If you want.*”
No greeting, no location, no time.

Still, I found her — on a bench, knees drawn up, headphones in, eyes closed. When she noticed me, she took off the headphones and shifted slightly to the side, as if it were obvious I should sit down.

We barely talked.
She asked questions that sounded like tests:

“What are you afraid of?”
“What keeps you awake?”
“Why do you think people need each other?”

I answered as best I could.
Sometimes she nodded, sometimes she shook her head, sometimes she smiled briefly, as if she had just solved a private riddle.

On Friday we met again.

This time she seemed restless, as if she were waiting for something that didn't come.

"I'm expecting someone today," she said suddenly.

"Who?"

"Someone who understands me. Or at least pretends to."

She stood up, put on her jacket, and looked at me as if she had to make a decision.

"If you want, you can come with me tomorrow," she said.

"Where?"

"Dinner. The three of us."

"Who's the third person?"

She smiled.

"My friend. Her name is Liora."

The name hung in the air — soft and sharp at the same time.

I didn't know what awaited me.

But I knew I would go.

2 – Liora

The next evening I stood in front of the restaurant Clarissa had sent me. A small Thai place, unremarkable from the outside but glowing warmly inside, as if it were guarding a secret. I was early — maybe out of nervousness, maybe out of curiosity.

Clarissa arrived on time.

She looked different than usual — not calmer, but more focused, as if she had prepared herself for something

inwardly. Beside her walked a woman I recognized instantly as Liora, even before Clarissa introduced her.

Liora had a quiet presence.

Not shy, not withdrawn — more like someone who observes the world before deciding whether to speak in it. Her hair was dark and smooth, her movements soft, almost meditative. She wore a simple dress that emphasized her calm even more.

“This is her,” Clarissa said.

No explanation, no name.

Just that sentence.

Liora smiled gently and offered me her hand.

“I’m glad to meet you,” she said. Her voice was warm but not ingratiating.

I sensed immediately that she was the kind of person you couldn’t impress — and didn’t need to.

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We sat at a small table by the window.

The waitress brought water, and Clarissa ordered for all of us without asking. It wasn’t rude — more an expression of her habit of shaping situations before they formed on their own.

“Clarissa told me about you,” Liora said.

“Only bad things,” Clarissa cut in.

“Only true things,” Liora corrected softly.

I couldn’t tell whether they were joking or whether this was simply how they spoke to each other. Perhaps both.

The conversation began hesitantly, then flowed more easily. Liora asked questions that weren’t curious but precise:

“What do you do when you’re not working?”

“What does silence mean to you?”

“Do you believe people can change?”

Clarissa listened; sometimes she commented briefly, sometimes she contradicted sharply, sometimes she laughed suddenly, as if she had reached a thought no one else could follow.

There was a dynamic between them that was hard to name:

Affection, yes.

Respect, clearly.

But also something like a constant wrestling with truth — as if they kept each other awake.

“You’re different from the people Clarissa usually brings,”

Liora said at one point.

“I don’t bring anyone,” Clarissa objected.

“Exactly,” Liora said.

It wasn’t a compliment, but it wasn’t criticism either.

More a statement that struck me without hurting.

When we left the restaurant, it had grown dark.

The street gleamed with rain, and Clarissa pulled her hood deep over her face. Liora walked beside her, slightly offset, as if she were protecting her without showing it.

“We’ll see each other again,” Liora said before getting into a taxi.

Not as a question, not as a request — as a certainty.

Clarissa watched her go, then looked at me.

“She likes you,” she said.

“And you?”

She shrugged.

“I don’t like people. But I like when they unsettle me.”

Then she walked away.

No goodbye, no glance back.

And I knew this was only the beginning.

3 – Nights of Conversation

In the days after our dinner together, something shifted. Not visibly, not spoken aloud, but perceptibly — like a faint crack in the routine. Clarissa wrote to me more often, though never long messages. Only brief impulses:

“You awake.”

“I’m thinking.”

“Come by, if you want.”

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They weren’t invitations in the usual sense.

More like openings. Narrow doors you only noticed if you looked closely.

I went often.

Not out of hope, but out of curiosity — and perhaps because Clarissa radiated a kind of energy one couldn’t ignore.

Her apartment was a different place at night.

The colors seemed darker, the shadows longer, and Clarissa herself seemed to change. She spoke faster, more intensely, as if trying to catch her thoughts before they scattered.

“People talk too much nonsense,” she said once.

“And you?” I asked.

“I talk to hear myself. Not to be understood.”

Sometimes Liora joined later.

She never rang. She opened the door with the natural ease of someone who wasn't a guest here. When she entered, the room calmed. Clarissa's movements softened, her voice deepened, her sentences became clearer.

“You bring order to her,” I said to Liora once.

She smiled.

“No. I just remind her that she's breathing.”

We often sat together late into the night.

Sometimes we talked about philosophy, sometimes about music, sometimes about nothing at all. Clarissa asked questions that were like knives:

“What's the difference between closeness and possession?”

“Why do people believe love will save them?”

“What are you running from?”

Liora asked different questions.

Softer, but no less precise:

“What gives you peace?”

“What would you do if you didn't have to prove anything to anyone?”

“What is truly missing?”

I realized they weren't testing me.

They were observing me.

Not as a man, not as a potential partner — but as a mirror.
As someone who made their own dynamic visible.

Once, around two in the morning, we sat silently on the floor.
Clarissa lay on her back, arms stretched out as if surrendering
herself to the room. Liora sat beside her, knees drawn up,
head resting against the wall.

“You’re different,” Clarissa said suddenly.

“How so?”

“You don’t want anything from me.”

I didn’t know whether it was an accusation or a compliment.
Perhaps both.

“Most people want something,” she continued.

“Validation. Closeness. Control. Something. You don’t. You just observe.”

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“Maybe,” I said.

“Or maybe I hide it better.”

Clarissa laughed softly.

“That would be new.”

Liora looked at me — long, without blinking.

“You’re here because you don’t need us,” she said.

“And that’s exactly why we let you in.”

It wasn’t a sentence you understood.

It was a sentence you felt.

When I left that night, the city was quiet.

The streets glistened with rain, and their voices echoed in my

head — Clarissa's sharp, Liora's calm. Two poles between which I moved without knowing where I was going.

And yet I knew:
I would return.

4 – Clarissa's Past

It was a late evening, one of those nights when the city feels exhaled. Clarissa had summoned me again — not with words, but with one of those clipped fragments she sent, messages that left more space than they filled:

"Come over. I can't sleep."

When I arrived, the apartment was dark except for a single lamp pointed at the floor. Clarissa sat beside it, knees drawn up, a cigarette in her hand that she wasn't smoking. **11**

"Sit," she said.

Her voice was calm, but not relaxed. More like someone who has made a decision they can no longer take back.

I sat across from her.

She looked at me for a long time, as if she needed to determine whether I was the right listener.

"I'm going to tell you something," she said at last.

"But only once. And only because tonight I don't want to fight it."

I nodded.

She began.

“I was never good at being normal,” she said. “Not even as a child. I felt things more intensely than others. Joy, anger, fear. Everything was too loud. Too close.”

She spoke without pathos, without self-pity.
More like someone reading out a diagnosis.

“When I was fourteen, I ran away from home. Not far. Just for one night. But it was enough for my mother to think I was... broken.” She gave a thin smile.

“She sent me to a therapist. A smart woman. She told me I wasn’t broken. Just unprotected.”

I didn’t ask anything.
Clarissa continued.

“At seventeen I decided I didn’t want men in my life anymore. Not because of trauma. Not ideology. Just because I realized they... disrupt me. Their expectations. Their insecurities. Their need to explain everything they don’t understand.”

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She looked at me, as if checking whether I felt addressed.
I didn’t.

“Women are different,” she said. “Not better. But they listen. They see you. They don’t want to possess you, they want to understand you. At least most of them.”

She set the cigarette down without lighting it.

“Liora found me when I had lost myself,” she said.
“Not in some dramatic moment. Just at a time when I was too much. For myself. For everyone.”

She paused, as if she needed to sort the words.

“She didn’t save me. That would be sentimental. But she stabilized me. Like a counterweight. When I fall, she doesn’t. And when she falls, I catch her.”

Suddenly I understood why Liora was so calm.

Why Clarissa seemed different beside her.

Why their relationship wasn’t romantic in the usual sense, but functional, precise, almost architectural.

“And you,” Clarissa said suddenly, “you’re... neutral.” She said it as if it were a rare compliment.

“You don’t want anything. You don’t expect anything. You just observe. That makes you harmless.”

I didn’t know if it was true.

But I knew she needed it to be.

“That’s why I’m telling you this,” she said.

“Because you won’t turn it into anything.”

Then she stood up, walked to the window, and opened it. Cold air rushed in.

“I’m not complicated,” she said quietly.

“I’m just... without a filter.”

It was the most honest sentence she had ever said to me.

5 – Liora’s Perspective

Liora was already waiting in the café when I arrived. A small place, almost empty, with large windows and the scent of

cardamom and warm pastries. She sat at the edge of the room — not hidden, but not centered either. A book lay in front of her, closed, as if she had placed it there only to keep her hands free.

She smiled when I sat down.

“Clarissa is still asleep,” she said. “Or pretending to be.”

I nodded.

It was always hard to tell with Clarissa — whether she slept when she said she did, or whether she simply disappeared to escape herself.

“You want to know what she’s like,” Liora said.

It wasn’t a question.

“Not out of curiosity. But because you want to understand how to be around her.”

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I was surprised by her directness.

Liora didn’t speak much, but when she did, every word was precise.

“Clarissa is... intense,” I said carefully.

“She’s a storm,” Liora corrected. “And storms need two things: space and resistance.”

She took a sip of tea and set the cup down softly.

“I’m the space,” she said.

“And you’re the resistance.”

I wasn’t sure whether it was a compliment.

Maybe it wasn’t.

Maybe it was simply true.

“Clarissa attracts people who mirror her,” Liora continued.
“But she only tolerates those who don’t try to fix her.”

She looked at me for a long moment, as if checking whether I understood.

“You don’t fix anyone,” she said finally.
“That’s rare.”

I felt she wasn’t judging me.
She was stating a fact.
Like a scientist recognizing a pattern.

“How did you two meet?” I asked.
Liora smiled — a quiet, almost sad smile.

“She was loud,” she said. “And I was tired.” She folded her hands.

“I thought she would be a distraction. But she was a truth.”

I waited.
Liora continued.

“Clarissa isn’t broken,” she said. “She’s just... without skin. Everything hits her directly. Joy. Pain. Closeness. Rejection. She feels everything other people filter.”

She looked out the window, as if she could see Clarissa somewhere out there.

“I learned not to hold her,” she said. “Only to accompany her.”

Then she turned back to me.

“And you,” she said, “you’re someone who doesn’t try to possess her. That unsettles her. And it calms her.”

I didn’t know what to say.
Maybe I didn’t need to.

“You’ll stay,” Liora said.
“Not forever. But long enough.”

It didn’t sound like a prophecy.
More like an observation already coming true.

When we left the café, Clarissa still hadn’t appeared.
But I felt closer to her — not through her, but through Liora.

And maybe that was the only way.

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6 – The Argument

It began on an evening that should have been quiet. Clarissa had invited both of us — Liora and me — without reason, without a plan. Her apartment was brightly lit, soft music played in the background, and three empty glasses stood on the table, untouched. It was one of those evenings when Clarissa tried to appear normal, though she wasn’t and never would be.

Liora sat on the sofa, legs crossed, a book in her hand she wasn’t reading. I stood by the window, looking down at the street. Clarissa paced restlessly between the kitchen and the living room, as if searching for something she couldn’t name.

“You’re so quiet,” she said suddenly.
It sounded like an accusation.

“We’re waiting for you,” Liora replied calmly.
“For what?” Clarissa snapped. “I’m right here.”

Liora closed the book.
“You’re here, but you’re not present.”

Clarissa stopped.
She looked at Liora, then at me, then back at Liora.
Something in her tightened.

“You two... you’re so controlled,” she said.
“So... reasonable. I can’t do that.”

I wanted to say something, but Liora lifted her hand slightly,
asking me to wait.

“What’s bothering you?” she asked.
Her voice was soft, but clear.

“Everything!” Clarissa shouted.
“You sit there like two observers. You analyze me. You
dissect me. I’m not a project.”

It was the first time she raised her voice.
Not aggressive — more desperate.

“No one is dissecting you,” Liora said.
“Yes!” Clarissa cried. “He is!”
She pointed at me.

I stayed calm.
Not out of strength, but because I knew any reaction would
be fuel on the fire.

“You watch me,” Clarissa said.

“You say nothing. You feel nothing. You sit there waiting for me to do something you can write down.”

It was a strange accusation.

And yet I understood it.

“Clarissa,” I said quietly, “I’m not writing anything down.”

“But you could!” she shouted.

“You could write everything. Every movement. Every word. Every weakness.”

Liora stood up.

Slowly.

Like someone who knows a sudden movement might break something fragile.

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“Clarissa,” she said, “he’s not your enemy.”

“No,” Clarissa said. “He’s worse. He’s neutral.”

The sentence hit me.

Not because it hurt — but because it was true.

Liora stepped toward her and placed a hand on her arm.

Clarissa recoiled as if burned.

“Don’t touch me,” she said.

Not angry.

Just exhausted.

Then she turned away, walked into the bedroom, and closed the door.

Not loudly.
But definitively.

Liora remained standing, her hand still half-raised, as if holding something that was no longer there.

“She’s afraid,” she said softly.
“Not of you. Of herself.”

I sat down on the sofa.
Liora sat beside me, but with distance.

“She’ll come back,” she said.
“But not tonight.”

We stayed there for a while, without speaking.
The apartment suddenly felt too big, too bright, too empty.

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When I left, Clarissa’s door was still closed.
I heard no footsteps, no voice, no breath.

Only silence.
A silence that didn’t soothe — but warned.

7 – The Reconciliation

For three days I heard nothing from Clarissa.
No message, no call, no impulsive sentence dropped into my phone like a stone. The silence wasn’t threatening, but it was unfamiliar. Clarissa was someone who vibrated even in quiet — and now there was nothing.

On the fourth evening, Liora wrote:

“She’s responsive again.”

Nothing more.
But enough.

I went to Clarissa’s apartment. The door was ajar, as if she had forgotten to close it, or as if it were an invitation she couldn’t bring herself to voice. Inside it was dark, only the kitchen light was on. Clarissa sat on the floor, her back against the wall, legs stretched out. Next to her stood a cup of tea, long cold.

She didn’t look up when I entered.
But she said, “You’re late.”

It wasn’t a reproach.
More an attempt to imitate normality.

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I sat down across from her, leaving space between us. She lifted her head, looked at me, and in her eyes was something I rarely saw in her: tiredness. Not physical — emotional.

“I was unfair,” she said.

The sentence came slowly, as if she had to push it through an inner resistance.

“You were honest,” I replied.

“No,” she said. “I was... exposed. And that’s not the same.”

She pulled her legs up, rested her forehead on her knees.
“I hate losing myself.”

I stayed silent.

Not out of uncertainty, but because words couldn't repair anything here.

After a while, Liora came from the kitchen.

She had moved quietly, as if not to disturb us. She placed three cups of tea on the floor and sat between us — not as a mediator, but as a steady point.

"You were afraid," Liora said to Clarissa.

"I'm always afraid," Clarissa murmured.

"No," Liora said. "Only when you like someone."

Clarissa lifted her head.

She looked at Liora first, then at me.

Her gaze was clearer now, but vulnerable.

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"I don't like you," she said to me.

It sounded almost defiant.

"I know," I said.

She snorted.

"You don't know anything."

Liora smiled softly.

"He knows enough."

Clarissa looked between us, as if deciding whether to open herself again. Then she moved a little closer — not much, just a few centimeters, but enough to show the storm had passed.

"I don't want you to leave," she said quietly.

"I'm not leaving," I answered.

She nodded, as if that was exactly the answer she had needed.

Liora placed a hand on Clarissa's back, gentle, without pressure.

Clarissa inhaled deeply, then exhaled.

For the first time in days, she seemed like herself again — not stable, but balanced.

"We're not starting over," she said.

"We're just continuing."

It wasn't a promise.

It was a decision.

And it was enough.

8 – The Last Dinner for Three

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It was Liora who suggested the meeting.

Not Clarissa.

That alone was unusual.

She wrote to me in the afternoon:

"Indian tonight. The three of us. It's important."

Nothing more.

But the tone was different — not urgent, but final.

The restaurant was tucked away in a side street, warm light, muted voices, the smell of cardamom, ginger, and fried rice. I was early again. Maybe out of habit. Maybe because I sensed the evening would have a different color.

Clarissa and Liora arrived together.
But something about them was shifted.
Not between them — between Clarissa and the world.

Clarissa seemed quieter than usual, not tense, but...
composed.
Like someone who had made a decision no one else knew
yet.

We sat at a table along the wall.
The waitress brought water, and this time Liora ordered.
Not Clarissa.

A small detail, but it changed the atmosphere.

“You look tired,” I said to Clarissa.
She shrugged.
“I’m thinking a lot.”

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“About what?” Liora asked.
Clarissa looked at her, then at me, then down at the table.

“About us,” she said.
“About everything.”

It didn’t sound threatening.
Just honest.

The food arrived.
We ate in silence, but it wasn’t an uncomfortable silence.
More a silence preparing something.

Liora was the first to speak.

"You're withdrawing," she said to Clarissa.
Not accusing.
Just stating.

Clarissa nodded.
"I have to."

"Why?" I asked.
Not curious.
Just calm.

Clarissa set down her fork.
She looked at me — long, without blinking.

"Because I like both of you," she said.
"And that makes me... restless."

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Liora placed a hand on Clarissa's arm.
This time Clarissa didn't pull away.

"Restlessness isn't an enemy," Liora said.
"Yes it is," Clarissa replied. "For me it is."

She inhaled deeply, then exhaled.

"I need distance," she said.
"Not from you," she looked at Liora, "and not from you," she
looked at me.
"But from what we are as three."

It wasn't a farewell.
But it was a boundary.

Liora nodded slowly, as if she had expected it.
“Then we’ll walk with you,” she said.
“Up to that boundary.”

Clarissa gave a faint smile.
A rare, vulnerable smile.

“You’re too good,” she said.
“That’s the problem.”

We paid.
Outside, it had started to rain.
The street gleamed, lights reflecting like scattered thoughts.

We stood together under a small awning.
No one spoke.
It was a moment that didn’t want to be filled.

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Then Clarissa started walking.
Not fast.
Not fleeing.
Just walking.

Liora watched her go, hands in her pockets, calm, but with an expression that showed she understood more than she said.

“It will change,” she said quietly.
“But it won’t disappear.”

I knew she was right.
And that this was the beginning of a new chapter — not dramatic, not loud, but quiet, like a shadow shifting its shape.

9 – The Disappearance

It didn't begin with a message.
It began with the absence of one.

Clarissa usually wrote impulsively, irregularly — sometimes in the middle of the night, sometimes early in the morning, sometimes just a single word that left more space than it filled. But now nothing came.

No *"You awake."*

No *"I'm thinking."*

No *"Come over."*

At first I thought she needed distance.
Then I thought she wanted it.
And eventually I realized she had already taken it.

26

On the third day, Liora wrote:

"She hasn't disappeared. She's just somewhere else."

A sentence meant to reassure — but it didn't.

I went to Clarissa's apartment.
The door was closed, firmly this time. No light seeped through the cracks. No music. No movement. I didn't knock. I knew she wouldn't open.

The stairwell smelled of fresh paint.
A strange contrast to the silence behind her door.

The next evening I met Liora.
She was waiting on a bench in the park, hands in her pockets,

eyes on the ground. When I sat down, she didn't look up immediately.

"She's withdrawn," she said at last.

"Where to?" I asked.

"Inside," she replied.

It wasn't a metaphor.

It was a diagnosis.

"She does this sometimes," Liora continued. "When something gets too close. Or too much. Or too true."

I thought of the last dinner.

Of Clarissa's quiet voice.

Of her sentence: *I need distance.*

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"Did she tell you anything?" I asked.

Liora shook her head.

"Clarissa doesn't explain," she said. "She acts. And later she pretends it was obvious."

We sat in silence for a while.

The park was almost empty, only a few scattered footsteps on the gravel path. The air was cool, but clear.

"Are you worried?" I asked.

Liora looked at me, and in her eyes was a mixture of tiredness and tenderness.

"Always," she said.

"But I know she'll come back. Not to me. Not to you. But to herself."

I understood what she meant.
Clarissa wasn't someone who disappeared to be found.
She disappeared to find herself again.

"And us?" I asked.
Liora gave a faint smile.

"We don't wait," she said.
"We just stay open."

It was a sentence that said more about her than about
Clarissa.

When I walked home later, I thought of Clarissa's apartment,
the closed door, the silence behind it.
It wasn't a final silence.
It was a silence preparing something.

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A silence that breathed.

10 – The Return

It was an ordinary afternoon, one of those days when the city
moves evenly, without surprises. I was sitting in NonTox —
not because I was waiting for Clarissa, but because the place
had become a neutral space over the past weeks, an
in-between zone where nothing needed to be decided.

I drank tea, read a book that didn't really hold me, and
thought about nothing in particular.
Then someone sat down next to me.

Not across from me.
Not at an angle.
Next to me.

I looked up.
Clarissa.

She wore a dark jacket, the hood half pulled over her head, as if she wanted to shield herself from the world — but not from me. Her eyes were clear, more awake than usual, almost calm.

“You’re still here,” she said.
It didn’t sound surprised.
More like a statement she needed to confirm for herself.

“I’m here often,” I replied.
“I know,” she said. “I’ve seen you.”

She didn’t order anything.
She just sat there, hands in her pockets, shoulders slightly tense.
The kind of tension that didn’t come from fear, but from concentration.

“Were you gone?” I asked.
Not curious.
Just open.

“No,” she said. “I was... inside.”

A typical Clarissa sentence.
And yet this time it was different.
Not a shield — a truth.

She looked at me, long, without blinking.

“I thought you’d leave,” she said.

“Why?” I asked.

“Because people leave when I disappear.”

I shook my head.

“I’m not here because of you,” I said.

“I know,” she said. “That’s why you stayed.”

She pushed the hood back, ran a hand over her head — a gesture that looked both vulnerable and defiant.

“Liora says I should talk,” she said.

“Do you want to?” I asked.

“No,” she said. “But I’m doing it anyway.”

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She took a deep breath.

“I was afraid,” she said.

“Not of you. Not of Liora. Of... the in-between.”

I understood.

Clarissa could handle closeness.

And distance.

But the in-between — the unclear, the undecided — was her enemy.

“I’m not good with transitions,” she said.

“I know,” I replied.

She smiled briefly.

A small, genuine smile.

"You're always so calm," she said.

"It unsettles me."

"I know," I said.

"And it calms me," she added.

She looked at her hands, then back at me.

"I'm back," she said.

"Not completely. But enough."

It wasn't a promise.

But it was more than an apology.

I nodded.

"Good."

We sat in silence for a while.

Not like strangers.

Not like friends.

More like two people who can share a silence without needing to explain it.

When she stood up, she said:

"Come by tomorrow. Liora will be there too."

It didn't sound like an invitation.

More like a sentence already decided.

Then she left.

Not quickly.

Not fleeing.

Just walking.

And I knew:

This wasn't a return to what had been.

It was the beginning of something new — undefined, open, but clear enough to continue.

11 – The New Order

The next day I stood again in front of Clarissa's apartment. Not out of obligation, not out of worry — more out of a quiet sense of certainty that had formed over the past weeks. I didn't ring. I waited. And after half a minute, Liora opened the door.

She smiled — a warm, but tired smile.

"She's awake," she said.

It sounded like both an invitation and a warning.

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Clarissa sat by the window, legs pulled up, her head resting against the frame. She looked outside as if watching the street, but I knew she was really looking inward. When she noticed me, she lifted her hand briefly — a small, almost childlike gesture that expressed more closeness than words.

"You're here," she said.

"Yes," I replied.

Liora put on tea.

Clarissa didn't get up.

I sat down on the floor, a little distance away — not too close, not too far.

It was the right distance — the one she could bear.

"I've been thinking," Clarissa said.
Her voice was calm, but not fragile.
"About us. About... all of this."

I waited.
She continued.

"I can't be what people want," she said.
"I can't be constant. Not reliable. Not... stable."

Liora came from the kitchen, placed three cups on the floor,
and sat with us.

"No one is asking that," she said.

"Yes," Clarissa replied. "Everyone. Always."

"Not us," Liora said.

33

Clarissa looked at her, then at me.
Her gaze was clearer than it had been in days.

"You're different," she said.
"You don't want anything from me. You... are simply here."

It wasn't praise.
It was recognition.

"I need an order," she said.
"Not control. Just... lines."

Liora nodded.
"What kind of lines?"

Clarissa thought.
For a long time.
Then she spoke slowly, as if forming the words for the first time.

“I want the three of us,” she said.
“But not... bound. Not defined. Just... connected.”

It was a sentence difficult to grasp.
And yet I understood it immediately.

“No possession,” Liora said.
“No claims,” Clarissa added.
“Just presence,” I said.

Clarissa looked at me — surprised, almost relieved.

“Yes,” she said. “Exactly that.”

We sat in silence for a while.
Not like people solving a problem.
More like people learning a new language — slowly,
tentatively, but together.

Liora leaned back, hands around her cup.
“Then that’s our order,” she said.
“Not fixed. Not rigid. But real.”

Clarissa nodded.
“I can live with that.”

It was the greatest concession she could make.

When I left later, the door remained open.
Not wide — just a crack.
But enough to show I wasn't standing outside.

And that something new had begun.
Quiet.
Unhurried.
But clear.

12 – The Decision

It was a Sunday morning, unusually bright for the season. The city looked freshly washed, as if the night's rain had rinsed away everything unnecessary. I was on my way to Clarissa and Liora's place — without an appointment, but with the sense that the day carried something that had been lingering in the air for a long time.

35

The door was ajar.
A sign I had learned to understand.

Inside, Clarissa and Liora were sitting on the floor, a map of the city spread out between them. No trip, no plan — just lines, streets, places Clarissa traced with her finger, as if transferring her thoughts onto the paper.

She looked up when I entered.
“Good that you're here,” she said.
It didn't sound like coincidence.
More like part of her decision.

I sat down with them.
Liora handed me tea — warm, calming.
Clarissa looked at me directly, without avoiding anything.

“I’ve decided something,” she said.
Her voice was calm, almost matter-of-fact.

I waited.

“I’m going away for a while,” she said.
“Not far. Just... out of the routine.”

Liora nodded, as if she had expected it.
“Where?” I asked.
Clarissa shrugged.

“It doesn’t matter,” she said.
“It’s not about the place. It’s about the distance.”

She ran her finger across the map — without direction,
without destination.

36

“I need space to sort myself,” she said.
“Not from you. From me.”

It wasn’t a farewell.
It was self-clarification.

“How long?” Liora asked.
“As long as it takes,” Clarissa replied.

She looked at both of us, and in her eyes was something new
— no fear, no restlessness, but a kind of clarity she rarely
showed.

“I don’t want you to wait,” she said.
“I just want you to... stay. Not here. Not in a place. But in the
connection.”

Liora placed a hand on Clarissa's knee.

"We stay," she said.

"But we don't hold you."

Clarissa nodded.

"That's exactly what I mean."

She stood up, walked to the window, opened it.

The air was cool, fresh — almost symbolic.

"I'm not leaving you," she said.

"I'm just going a little ahead."

It was a sentence that changed everything without breaking anything.

I stood up as well.

"Then go," I said.

"And come back when you want."

Clarissa turned to me.

"I'll come back," she said.

"But not as the same person."

Liora smiled.

"No one does."

Clarissa took her jacket, a small bag — nothing more.

She kissed Liora on the forehead, brief, tender.

Then she looked at me — long, calm.

"Take care of her," she said.

"She takes care of herself," I replied.

Clarissa nodded.

“True.”

Then she left.

Not fleeing.

Not searching.

But determined.

The door closed softly behind her.

Liora and I stood in the room that suddenly felt larger — but not empty.

“She’ll come back,” Liora said.

“Yes,” I said.

“But different.”

Liora nodded.

“And so will we.”

It wasn’t an ending.

It was a line continuing forward — open, quiet, clear.

EPILOGUE – Between Light and Taboo

Weeks later, I found myself back at NonTox.

It was early afternoon, the same hour as when everything had begun. Light fell at an angle through the windows, dust drifting like small, undecided thoughts. The music was quiet, almost indifferent. The room felt larger than usual, perhaps because no one was there to fill it.

I sat at the bar and ordered water, as always.

The bartender nodded as if he knew me, though he didn’t.

Or perhaps he did — people like me don't go unnoticed, even when they think they do.

I wasn't thinking about Clarissa.

And yet she was there.

Not as an image, not as a memory, but as a movement inside me that could no longer be undone.

Liora had written to me a few days earlier:

"She's on the road. She's fine."

Nothing more.

But enough.

I knew Clarissa hadn't disappeared.

She had simply... moved on.

Not away from us, but away from the point where she had been standing still.

I took a sip of water and looked at the empty dance floor, which seemed almost peaceful in the afternoon light. A place loud at night, but carrying a strange honesty during the day.

Clarissa had once said:

"I'm not a taboo. I'm an experiment."

Back then, I hadn't understood what she meant.

Now I did.

She wasn't a riddle to be solved.

Not a wound to be healed.

Not a story to be owned.

She was a line.
A movement.
A transition.

And we — Liora and I — were not her destination.
We were simply two points where she paused for a moment
before moving on.

I stood up, left a few coins on the counter, and stepped
outside.

The street was bright, almost glaring.
The city smelled of rain and spring.

I knew I would see Clarissa again.

Not today.

Not tomorrow.

But someday, in a place that wasn't planned.

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And when she appeared — casually, as always — she would
be different.

And so would I.

Between light and taboo, there are no fixed paths.

Only encounters.

And the traces they leave behind.