



The Invisible Guest

John Kuro



Maya sits squeezed in the back of the Uber, her shoulder pressed hard against the cold window. Outside, a steady drizzle turns the city lights into a smear of neon and grey, mirroring the damp chill in her heart.



Sarah leans across Maya to show Leo a video on her phone, laughing so hard her elbow digs into Maya's ribs. No one looks her way or offers an apology; they are lost in a shared world of inside jokes and digital memories she isn't part of.



As they talk about a camping trip she never knew existed, Maya watches the raindrops race down the glass. She realizes there is a secret digital thread connecting them all—a group chat where she was never invited and where the real memories are made.



She thinks back to all the times she was the one with the car, the one who listened to their heartbreaks until dawn, and the one who always arrived first. She believed that being indispensable was the same thing as being loved, but now that belief feels like a fading dream.



In the dim, flickering light of the passing streetlamps, Maya feels like the wallpaper of a well-loved room. Everyone enjoys the atmosphere she provides, but no one truly notices her presence until she starts to fade or peel away from the wall.



The Uber pulls to a stop at the curb, and the others spill out in a rush of excitement and loud voices. They are already halfway to the bar's glowing entrance before the car door even clicks shut, their laughter trailing behind them like smoke.



Maya stands alone on the damp sidewalk, the cold air biting at her cheeks as she watches their retreating backs. Instead of following, she stays perfectly still, a silent shadow under the streetlamp, testing the weight of her own absence.



She waits for a single head to turn, for someone to realize the group is smaller than it was a moment ago. She holds her breath, desperately hoping for a voice to call out her name into the rainy night and bridge the growing distance.



The heavy door of the bar swings shut, cutting off the sound of their laughter and the warmth of the music inside. The space she usually occupies isn't a hole they need to fill; it is just empty air that no one even notices.



Standing alone in the dark, Maya finally understands the chilling truth: she was never a foundation, only a backup plan. She turns away from the bar and the closed door, finally ready to stop being the spare tire in someone else's journey.