The Apron and the Pen

B Alan Bourgeois · Opening excerpt · 1 of 2

Alan woke to a silence so thick it pressed against his ears.

The dim morning light filtered through the beige curtains, casting soft, golden ribbons across the unmade bed. One side of the sheets lay tangled and empty, while the other—his side—still held a trace of warmth, a faint indentation where a man’s body had rested just hours ago.

He didn’t move. Not at first.

He stared at the ceiling, where the fan lazily spun, clicking softly like a clock that had forgotten its job. His hand drifted across the mattress, brushing the short, wiry hairs left behind—dark against the white cotton like whispers that refused to fade. The pillow beside him still carried the scent: burnt sugar, warm spice, and something unnamable that lingered like memory.

Josph.

For a moment, Alan allowed himself to pretend. Pretend that Josph had just slipped away to the kitchen to start another batch of cookies. That in a few minutes, the smell of butter and vanilla would drift through the door. That Josph’s voice would rise—laughing, teasing, full of brightness. That this wasn’t just a morning after, but the beginning of a day with.

Reading sample — continued

But the apartment was silent. Still. Empty.

Alan exhaled slowly. Sat up.

His body ached—not from age alone, but from the way emotional vulnerability could rearrange your insides. He rubbed his chest, absentmindedly tracing the place where Josph’s head had rested, where his warmth had been. It was the ache of contact without promise. Of touch without tether.

He shuffled to the kitchen barefoot, each step echoing across the wood floor like a reminder: You knew better. You’re too old to believe in moments like that.

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The kettle hissed as it began to boil.

Alan leaned against the counter, staring at the row of spices Josph had used the night before—cinnamon, nutmeg, sea salt, and almond extract. They looked ordinary, but somehow now carried the weight of intimacy. Of ritual. Of hands that moved with purpose, that knew how to coax sweetness from simplicity.

The camera still sat on the tripod. Battery light blinking red. It hadn't been touched since he’d turned it off just before midnight. Josph, shirtless in his apron, his voice casual, his eyes burning. The footage was all there. Alan couldn’t bear to look.