

Liam alone in his bedroom, his mind racing, his body still tense from the encounter with Britney. He hastily put his clothes back on, his hands trembling slightly as he struggled to wear a simple T-shirt. Chloe could walk in any moment now, and he couldn't afford to look shaken. He forced himself to take deep breaths, but the knot in his stomach refused to loosen.

He could still feel the cold air against his skin from when she barged in unannounced. His stomach churned with anxiety. How could he have been so careless? Leaving the door unlocked—such a stupid mistake. A mistake that cost him everything.



His mind spiraled into worst-case scenarios. Britney now knew the truth—she had seen him, and there was no way to erase that moment. What if she told Chloe about today's incident? What if she twisted the story to make it seem worse than it was? Their relationship was already fragile; this could be the final blow.

It reminded him of when he was a kid and broke the neighbor's car window with a stray soccer kick. He had spent hours trying to act normal, hoping his neighbor lady wouldn't notice. The guilt, the fear of being found out, had made him sick to his stomach.



But when the neighbor, Mrs. Thompson saw it in the CCTV camera, she had stepped out and called him over, his composure crumbled. Tears had welled up in his eyes before he even spoke. He had apologized over and over, his voice shaking, pleading with her not to tell his parents. He had promised never to step foot near her house again, swearing he'd do anything to make up for it.

To his surprise, Mrs. Thompson had simply sighed, studied his tear-streaked face for a long moment, and then, in an act of unexpected mercy, let it go. She had never said a word to his parents, and he had carried that relief with him like a secret blessing.



And now, here he was again—an adult, yet feeling just as small and helpless. He could only hope that Britney would show him the same kind of mercy, that she wouldn't say anything to Chloe about today's incident.

No. He couldn't risk it. He had to keep this from Chloe. She didn't need to know. As long as Britney kept quiet, everything would be fine. He had already decided—he'd endure this job for a few weeks, save up, and then move on with his life. This was just a temporary hurdle.

Just as he was trying to steel himself, he heard the front door open. His heart skipped a beat. Chloe was home.



Chloe stepped inside, dropping her bag by the door.
"Hey, Liam," she called out, her voice warm.
"How was your day at the bakery café?"

Chloe's brows knitted together as she walked over.
"You do look a little off. Everything okay?"

Liam cleared his throat, forcing a casual smile.
"Uh, I wasn't feeling great today. I, um... stayed home."





She studied him for a moment before softening.
"Oh, baby, if you're not feeling well, don't push yourself. Just rest. I'm here, okay?" She leaned in, pressing a gentle kiss on his forehead.

Liam fought the urge to fidget.
"Yeah, I'm fine," he said quickly, flashing a forced grin.

Liam exhaled slowly, relieved that she didn't press further. He nodded.
"Thanks, Chloe. I'll be fine. I just need to get back to work tomorrow." There was a pause before Liam hesitated, "Hey, Chloe... you mentioned that plan about us working together. Have you thought more about it?"

Chloe perked up.
"Yeah, actually, I have been researching it. I need a little more time, though. The biggest challenge is the initial capital."



Liam tilted his head.
"How much are we talking?"



Chloe pursed her lips.
"At least \$100K in hand."

Chloe sighed, shaking her head.
"Liam, the interest rates are ridiculously high right now. The return on investment wouldn't make sense if we took a loan."

Liam's eyes widened.
"What? A hundred grand? Where are we supposed to get that kind of money? Are you thinking about taking a loan?"



"We need to earn and save it ourselves."

Liam frowned.
"Then what's the plan?
Where are we going to get
the money?"

Liam swallowed
hard.
"Ourselves?"



She nodded.
“Look, I’ve run some numbers. If we both work and save aggressively for six months, we could put away about \$25K. Then I can reach out to a few old friends to see if they’d be interested in either helping out or coming on as partners.”

Liam felt the weight of her words settle on him like a ton of bricks.
Six more months of this—of working at the bakery, of dealing with Britney, of maintaining the charade. The thought made his stomach twist.
“Chloe,” he said cautiously, “can’t we bring in your friends now? Get them on board before we start?”



Chloe gave him a sympathetic look.
"Liam, no one is going to invest unless we show that we're willing to put in the effort. We need to have some skin in the game."

Chloe reached for his hand, squeezing it reassuringly.
"Baby, this will pass like the wind, trust me. Six months from now, we'll be in a much better place. We'll have a future together."

Liam's shoulders slumped. He felt trapped. He had been holding onto the idea that this was temporary, that he could walk away soon. But now, six months felt like an eternity. And with Britney knowing his secret, it could turn into a nightmare.



Chloe smiled.
"I'll draft it out soon
and send it to you."

Liam forced a nod, but his mind
was in turmoil.
"Yeah," he muttered, his voice
hollow. "By the way... what's your
business idea about?"

Liam nodded again, but inside, he felt like the walls were closing in.

