

## **"Unlove"**

**by Dinda Unaroma**

Nayra, a 27-year-old up-and-coming architect living in Jakarta, seems to have it all - a successful career, independence, and ambition. Yet, familial expectations to marry weigh heavily, leading her ailing mother to express a longing to see Nayra settled. Compelled by duty and her own doubts, Nayra reaches out to Rio, her high school boyfriend. Their reunion reveals a lack of emotional depth in their past relationship, stirring Nayra's realization that she never felt heartbreak over their breakup.

Troubled by her emotional disconnect, Nayra finds herself opening up to Raisa, a fellow artist at her firm, about her recent reunion with Rio. As Nayra shares her perplexity over the lack of heartbreak from their past relationship, Raisa listens with empathy. Sensing Nayra's need for a new perspective, Raisa gently suggests exploring the world of online dating. She offers this as a way for Nayra to gain new experiences and perhaps understand her feelings better.

Nayra then tries as Raisa suggested, delving into the world of online dating. She matches with Arman, a tech entrepreneur whose witty texts and engaging online persona captivate her. However, when they meet in person, the dynamic shifts dramatically. The lively banter and spark that seemed so vivid digitally fall flat, leaving Nayra feeling more disconnected than ever. The realization that online chemistry doesn't always translate to real-life connection hits her hard.

Undeterred, Nayra continues her exploration and soon crosses paths with Zen, a brooding musician known for his deep, soulful music. They share a passionate rendezvous that sweeps Nayra into a world of intense emotions. However, Zen's emotional depth and complexities, though alluring, prove too overwhelming for Nayra. She finds herself unable to match his level of passion, leading her to retreat from this too-intense connection.

Throughout these experiences, Nayra's rapport with Raisa evolves. They spend countless evenings discussing Nayra's dating adventures, with Raisa offering a listening ear and thoughtful advice. Their conversations, often late into the night, reveal layers of understanding and empathy. This growing closeness forms a deep bond of platonic intimacy between them.

Yet, as their friendship deepens, Raisa begins to experience a shift in her feelings. She finds herself drawn to Nayra in a way that transcends friendship. The late-night talks, the shared laughs, and the comfort they find in each other's company ignite something new in Raisa. She starts to realize that her affection for Nayra might be more than platonic, a realization that both excites and confuses her.

After a series of lackluster dating adventures, Nayra is introduced to Andi by her hopeful mother. Kind, grounded, and devoted to his roots, Andi appears to be the perfect life partner her family envisions for her. As Nayra entertains the possibility of a promising future with this seemingly ideal man, their relationship takes a significant step forward. Andi invites Nayra to meet his family at an intimate celebratory dinner, a gesture that signifies the seriousness of their courtship and aligns with the expectations her mother holds for her.

But the night is disrupted when Dino unexpectedly shows up, clearly distraught. His cryptic confrontation with Andi reveals there are unspoken troubles in their relationship that Andi refuses to acknowledge. Nayra doesn't immediately piece their dynamic together though.

It's only after reflecting deeply that she approaches Andi, and he crumbles - admitting that Dino is actually his long-term secret boyfriend. They hid this truth from disapproving families. Nayra reels at the illusion of Andi shattering, catalyzing hard but needed realizations about her own emotional truths...

Shaken by the revelation about Andi, Nayra seeks solace from the one person who knows her deepest self - Raisa. She pours her heart out about the illusion shattering and how it unlocked revelations about how she wishes to love. Raisa provides comfort and reminds Nayra that only she can dictate her own journey.

Raisa then decides to help her friend break free from the whirlwind of emotions. She organizes a series of outings and adventures, aiming to bring some lightness and joy back into Nayra's life.

They embark on a journey across Jakarta's vibrant landscape, visiting lively art exhibits, engaging in impromptu dance sessions in bustling night markets, and laughing over coffee in quaint, hidden cafes. Raisa's efforts to uplift Nayra include a spontaneous weekend trip to a beachside town, filled with sun-soaked days and starlit evenings.

Nayra finds herself gradually unwinding, the laughter and new experiences acting as a balm to her troubled thoughts. Raisa's presence and their shared adventures not only distract Nayra from her recent heartaches but also reinforce the strength of their bond. It's in these moments of carefree joy that Nayra begins to rediscover parts of herself she had forgotten, and Raisa finds herself increasingly drawn to Nayra, not just as a friend but possibly something more.

The turning point in Nayra and Raisa's relationship arrives during a serene weekend retreat orchestrated by Raisa. In a moment brimming with vulnerability, Raisa confesses her deeply held romantic feelings for Nayra. The confession, raw and sincere, catches Nayra off guard.

Struggling to process this revelation and her own tangled emotions, Nayra's response is to flee, creating a rift between them. In the ensuing weeks, Nayra is haunted by a turmoil of feelings; her heart aches with affection for Raisa, yet she's tormented by her inability to return Raisa's romantic love. This emotional dissonance leaves her feeling lost and isolated.

Raisa, in turn, grapples with the crushing weight of rejection. The heartbreak is palpable, her hopes for a deeper connection with Nayra shattered. She's left to navigate a labyrinth of hurt and unanswered questions.

Amidst this emotional upheaval, Nayra confronts a life-shattering loss: the death of her mother. The funeral becomes a somber ground for Nayra and Raisa's reunion. It's a setting steeped in grief and reflection, where their paths intertwine once more. Amid the echoes of mourning, they find themselves sharing a space of raw vulnerability. Nayra, with poignant honesty, articulates the chaos within her - the yearning to love Raisa as she deserves, yet the inescapable realization of her emotional boundaries. Raisa, mirroring Nayra's candor, shares the pain and confusion wrought by Nayra's abrupt departure.

In their heartfelt exchange, Nayra struggles to articulate her complex emotions. "Raisa, I care about you, I truly do, and I love you, but not in the way you want me to... not in the way I thought might be possible," she says, her voice tinged with a mix of sadness and sincerity. "I considered it, really. But if what I feel isn't love, then I don't know what is. I've tried to understand, to feel it, but I just can't... I might be incapable of love, in the way others experience it." Her words, raw and honest, reflect her inner conflict and the realization of her unique emotional landscape.

Raisa listens intently, her eyes reflecting a blend of understanding and melancholy. After a pause, she responds with a gentle yet firm resolve. "Nayra, I appreciate your honesty more than you can imagine. It's not easy, hearing this, but I understand. I never expected to feel this way about someone, let alone you... let alone another woman. It's been a journey for me too, understanding these feelings," she says softly.

She reaches out, taking Nayra's hands in hers, a gesture of enduring friendship. "I want you to know that our friendship means everything to me. I won't let these feelings change that. We've been through so much together, and I promise to always be here for you, just like I know you'll be for me."

Tears well up in Nayra's eyes as the weight of their conversation sinks in. She cries, not just out of sadness, but also from a sense of relief at having shared her truth. Raisa, with a comforting presence, gently wipes away Nayra's tears, her actions speaking volumes of their unbreakable bond.

**One Year Later**

The scene shifts to a year later at the company's party. Nayra, now fully embracing her single life, navigates the crowd with a newfound sense of self-assurance. Her eyes light up as she spots Raisa across the room, her heart swelling with joy upon seeing Raisa accompanied by her girlfriend.

As Nayra approaches them, the air is filled with warmth and affection. The reunion is heartfelt; smiles and embraces are exchanged. Nayra's happiness for Raisa is genuine and unmistakable. "I'm so happy for you," Nayra says, her smile reflecting her sincere joy for Raisa's newfound love.

Their conversation flows easily, filled with laughter and updates about their lives. The depth of their friendship is evident, a bond that has not only endured but grown stronger through their shared experiences and revelations. Their mutual respect and understanding, forged through moments of vulnerability, remain the cornerstone of their relationship.

As the party continues, Nayra steps back to mingle with other colleagues, but not before sharing a final, meaningful glance with Raisa. In that moment, there's an unspoken acknowledgment of their journey, a journey that has brought them to where they are - content, fulfilled, and forever connected.

**The End.**