

Lisa Said No

LISA SAID NO

by Lynda Allison Doty

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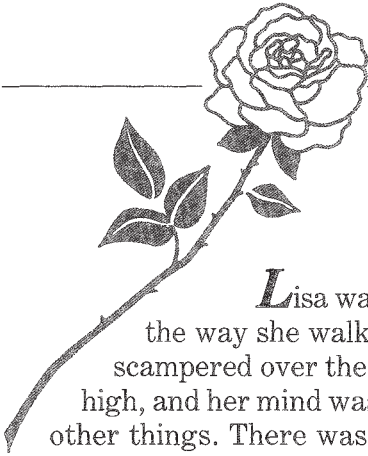
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*L*isa was in a hurry; you could tell by the way she walked. Determined, even paces scampered over the sidewalk. Her chin was held high, and her mind was obviously preoccupied with other things. There was an excitement about her, a certain electricity that surrounded her as she walked.

It was unusually cool for this late in May, and Lisa shivered slightly, pulling the sleeves of her sweater onto her arms. The sun was setting, and she wanted to get home before dark. Graduation practice had lasted longer than she had anticipated, and although it was only eight blocks from the high school to her house, tonight it somehow seemed longer. She shivered again and suddenly realized the chill was not just because of the weather. An eerie feeling settled over her. It was almost as if an unseen hand had moved down her spine. With sucked-in breath, Lisa sensed something was wrong.

Her footsteps moved faster. Her heart was beating fast—too fast, she knew. Speed up, speed up.

“Hi, Lisa!”

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Lisa turned toward the sound. Much to her relief there was Bill Avery, her history teacher. He was crossing the tree-lined street, coming towards her. "Oh! Mr. Avery!"

The older man peered at her over his small, round glasses. "Why, Lisa, what's wrong? You look as if you've seen a ghost."

Lisa pushed a strand of black hair off her forehead and forced a weak smile. "Just nervous, I guess, Mr. Avery."

The old man gazed at her intently. "You know, Lisa, it's not any of my business, but it might not be a good idea to be out on the streets by yourself. Especially this time of day. You are a young lady—and a mighty pretty one, I might add." Lisa relaxed. She liked Mr. Avery. He had been almost like a father to her these past four years. "The crime rate is soaring, you know," he went on, knowledgeably comparing crime rates across civilizations.

Lisa indulged in a big, contented smile as he fell into step with her, and they started off down the sidewalk together. Lisa noticed he was walking in the opposite direction than when they had first met. She opened her mouth to tease him about being so protective of her when she saw a darkened figure disappear into the alley right beside the Wilsons' house. It happened so fast, all Lisa could see was that it was a man, and he was wearing some kind of shirt with a huge, black heart on the front of it. Without even thinking, her footsteps faltered.

Mr. Avery had seen him, too. "Friend of yours?" he asked. And then, as though the look on her face commanded it, he started moving away in the direction of the shadows. Lisa watched in stunned silence as the old man limped away. Someone once said Mr. Avery had been

wounded in a war and that part of one of his legs had been cut off.

She stood now in the chilled evening, quiet, unmoving, hoping the figure would be brought back and made to explain its presence in her life tonight. What was such a sinister person doing on this quiet, peaceful street anyway? There were only houses along here, with lots of trees and neatly-trimmed bushes. That's why all the streets in this part of town were named after trees.

But Mr. Avery limped back, a humorless little smile across his face. "Sorry," he said. "He got away; he's a lot faster than I am."

Lisa, visibly disappointed, resumed walking. Actually Lisa did more striding than walking. Her steps had a lilt to them, a grace that seemed to match her. Lisa was slender, and her hair was so long it fell into curls all the way to her waist. The hair swished as she walked, and people always seemed to notice when she passed by.

They parted company at the corner of Spruce and Elm, and Lisa darted into her house. Mr. Avery waited until she disappeared behind the door. His mission had been to see her safely home, and that accomplished, he turned and walked away in the direction from which they had come.

Lisa felt such relief to be home! Why did things always look different in the safety of one's own home? But who was he? Lisa wandered through the dark house, turning on lights. "Mom? I'm home, you home?" The house was lonely, and Lisa remembered how frightened she and her mother used to get right after her father left. Years ago he had installed a costly burglar alarm system because he kept so much of his work at home. But even with that,