

EVERY THING'S NOT PERFECT?
IT'S OKAY, THAT'S LIFE.



PERFECTLY
IMPERFECT

A STORY OF EMBRACING
LIFE'S IMPERFECTIONS

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PERFECTLY

IMPERFECT

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Also,

Richard and the Magical adventure of the Secret Diamond

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I invite all readers to delve into the world of "Perfectly Imperfect," a tale of love, friendship, and the unpredictable twists of life. Join Hannah, and her friends as they navigate the challenges of youth. It's a story that reminds us that, in life, not all things will turn perfect, but when they do, they'll twist your life forever.

With heartfelt gratitude,

B.A.M.P.H.K. ATHAUDA

Preface

The primary goal of the current educational system is to mould a productive citizen and a caring family member who is equipped with knowledge and skills. The main responsibility of the school is to identify and recognize children's talents, as well as to sharpen their skills to meet the needs of the nation and the world. Our Alma Mater is constantly guiding and assisting children who are creative. This project has been an ongoing process at our school for many years, particularly in terms of writing books. Many skilled and enthusiastic young writers participated in this exercise for years, producing novice writers to field of literature. We regard this as a great victory and a national need at this hour. To continue this effort, we have adopted digital technologies and an e-book project this year. I am confident that this unique event provided youngsters with valuable experience and challenges that will benefit them in the future. The Ministry of Education has hailed the project as an important step toward motivating young authors in schools. As principal of Mahamaya Girls' College, I am grateful to all of the students throughout the country who contributed to this endeavor. I commend and applaud all of the young authors of these-books for their perseverance and devotion in this difficult task .I would like to thank our school management committee, employees, parents, for my students, administrators, and teachers from other schools who encouraged students to take part in this worthwhile effort.

Ms Shashikala Senadheera

Principal

Mahamaya Girls College - kandy

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ONE

In the final sun-drenched days of an endless summer, destiny decided to make its move, and my life shifted with a force which I never saw coming.

The air was thick with the scent of grass, and cicadas sang a melody that echoed our carefree youthful days. It was the kind of afternoon where everything felt eternal and unchanging, and you just want to pause time and live in that moment forever. But in a matter of a heartbeat, the eternal became ephemeral, and the unchanging morphed into a whirlwind of changes.

Back then, I was just another fifteen-year-old, lost in the ebb and flow of adolescence but quite enjoying life at the same time, spending time with friends, and relishing the warmth of a loving family beneath a secure roof. My dad spent his days working in a busy office, navigating the world of spreadsheets and meetings in the company. Meanwhile, my mom found her passion as a biology teacher, guiding students through lessons and experiments that made the subject more alive. Despite their busy lives, they always made time for our family.

“Children, will you please come downstairs for minute?” I heard my mom’s voice echoing. I went out of the room, heading down the hallway peacefully,

“Hey, chubs!” I heard a voice behind me, which belonged to none other than my elder brother.

“How many times do I need to repeat?! I'm NOT chubby!” I complained, frowning and hitting him on his arm playfully.

“Ouch! calm down, I was just kidding,” then he brushed past me, “But you were!” He shouted, running down the stairs.

That’s my elder brother, Derik. He’s such a crackhead but now a senior in high school. Talking of him at school, he’s a total heartthrob, I don’t know for what but he’s quite popular everywhere. A lot of girls at school know me as Derik Elsher’s younger sister.

While walking down the hallway, I knocked on my elder sister’s door, shouting at her to come outside. Yes, I have an annoying elder brother and a very bossy elder sister. But even though they seemed to be so frustrating at times, I know that I can always count on them no matter what the situation is. When I went down the stairs, mom signaled me to sit on the couch where Derik was already sitting, not being seemed to be bothered at any cost.

“Hannah, Where’s kylie?”

“Coming!” And then, my elder sister came running down the stairs, she was always the ‘it girl’ slaying everything she does. She was the captain of the cheerleading squad back in high school, now she got selected to enter the Stanford right after the summer vacation. That day, her application got selected among thousands of others, my parents seemed to be very proud of her. They kept talking about her with neighbors, people they met at work and everywhere else. Not only them, me and Derik were proud of her too.

“Okay, let’s start as everyone is gathered around!” Mom started with a very big smile laying across her face, “Your father has very good news for you all!” mom squealed, holding my father’s hand.

“Kids! I GOT A HUGE PROMOTION!” He shouted happily, making all of sequel together, congratulating him.

“Oh my god Dad! You got what you deserved!” Kylie said, hugging our father.

" Wait, I still didn't tell you all the best part!" Okay, that seemed to be exciting. And the next moment, he said; " We are going to move to a new city, and we'll own a mansion there!"

What?! Everyone seemed to be in shock, moving out to a new city? No way!

How could I leave my friends, school and this house where we spent our whole childhood? NOWAY! I looked around to see Derik, still in the same position looking more devastated than ever. My father and mother were eyeing us, waiting for a proper reaction. But everything seemed to be stuck, how could I move somewhere I am not used to? Will I be able to make friends? What if there are bullies? So many questions came flooding into my mind.

" I can't!" Derik finally spoke up, breaking the silence which was spreading through the thin air. " How? How can I leave here? I can't." he said in a very stern voice.

" Why? We are going to have a much bigger house than this one! There will be a bigger pool in the backyard, bigger living room, bigger rooms, everything will be there!" My father said, trying his best to convince us.

" What if I DON'T WANT ANYTHING BIGGER!?" Derik raised his voice, standing up.

" Watch your tone, young man!" My father seemed to be pissed off at this point. " I don't care about your opinions, Monday morning we are leaving, pack your bags!" He said calmly but in a very stern voice.

"Whatever," Derik rolled his eyes, stormed off to his room. Father also went inside of his room, not even bothering to question my opinion nor my elder sister's.

" What about you, Kylie?" My mom asked, looking at Kylie.

" I don't know mom, anyway, it doesn't matter to me as I'm moving out to California for the college." She said, not being bothered about the situation. My mom nodded, and finally eyed me.

" What about you sweetheart?"

" Will my opinion change dad's decisions?" I asked back,

" Probably not dear,"

" Then, I will keep my opinion to myself as dad doesn't care about in anyways." I said getting up from the couch. My mom seemed to be a bit stressed about the situation. As I was about to leave, mom spoke up;

" I know it's hard, but- your dad, he worked for years and years expecting the promotion and finally it's in his hands now. He always had the dream to move to an expensive city and make all our lives successful. He tends to work all day just to make all of us happy and healthy. He works to make your dreams come true. As a family, don't we have to support him in his own dreams?" Mom became a bit emotional saying this. I just stood there, not being able process everything which was happening. I just nodded and left. Until dinner time, I was thinking about it, and my mind seemed to be so messed up that I really wanted to cry so bad.

I looked outside of the window; the sky was ablaze with the fire of the setting sun. I kept staring at the sky, where birds were flying back to their nests, chirping. Looking at them from the window of my room makes me feel like I'm a caged bird. I had all the freedom to do anything I wanted to but now, everything seems so uneasy, and I'm not used to it. I kept on staring blankly,

" Hannah? love, may I come in?" I heard a voice, snapping me out.

" Come in,' and there he came, my father with a slight smile.

"Hey sweetheart," I just smiled, not bothering to greet back. I was just sitting there waiting for him to start off. " I know it's hard, but it will be okay. You'll make so many new friends there and on vacation we can also come back here to visit your friends. And there are so many-"

" It's fine," I sighed, cutting him off in the middle. When I looked up at my father's face, it was clearly different, now it's all filled with happiness.

" So, you are, okay?" He trailed off in excitement which almost had me giggling.

" Yep," I nodded vigorously, making his smile grow bigger.

" Thank you so much!" He pulled me into a very long hug, in his arms like every other daughter would feel between the arms of her father, I felt safe and sound. " All will turn out to be great there." He stated, looking down at me.

" You promise?" I asked, very innocently as I pulled away from the hug.

" With all my life dear," He promised. Then, we both walked down the stairs to get dinner. Long before I could even get ready properly, the day arrived. The day of us leaving the house and town where we practically grow, leaving all our friends behind. It wasn't easy at all.

After like six or seven hours of a long drive, we were finally there in my dad's dream city. It was so different, the skyscrapers almost touching the sky, people in various fashions going all around with most of them being on their phone seemed to be a very bothering sight to me. Everyone seemed to be busy in their own ways. After some time, our car stopped right in front of a gigantic black gate, where my father opened it with a remote and the car kept moving along, and parked. We all got out, looking around with surprise. The porch, living room, bedrooms, kitchen and the back yard seemed to be much bigger than I expected it to be. Seems like my father was not lying.

As all of us were busy with arranging and getting used to the new house, the time was moving fast so that soon the day of going to the new school arrived. I don't know why but I felt very anxious about meeting new people and getting used to a whole different environment. Dad dropped us both at the school, where I told my brother, Derik to be nowhere near me as I don't want everyone to name me as so called "Derik Alsher's sister". Somewhere, deep inside of myself kept telling me that this was going to be a fresh start off, and I want everything to be as I wanted it to be. As we went on separate ways, I went down the hallway gaining most of the attention of others. After some time roaming around the hallways which all seemed to be similar to one another, I found my way into the right classroom after so much effort. As I was about to walk in, I caught a glimpse of a teacher, she seemed to have already started the lesson.

I took a deep breath before opening the door and stepping inside to have all eyes on me.

" Excuse me," I mumbled, smiling at the teacher.

" Oh dear, are you-" she looked down, fixing her glasses and starting to look for something in a file. Finally, she took out a paper from the file. "Hannah Alsher?"

" Yes Miss" I smiled as she flashed a gorgeous smile towards me.

" Hi, I'm Ms. Baker. Nice to meet you dear!" she greeted, shaking hands with me. She seemed to be around thirties, her long blond hair was tied up in a ponytail while her black round glasses gave her more of a professional look. She seemed to be very kind and outgoing from first sight.

" Listen everyone, this is the new student I told you about, Hannah, Will you introduce yourself to the class?" I wanted to be like I am, and just smile and get away with the question as I have a fear of public speaking but- I have always wanted a fresh start and this is my chance to come out with a whole different perspective of myself. I smiled, turning around to face other students.

" Hi! I'm Hannah Alsher, 15 years old. I think of myself as a very outgoing, friendly character. Hope I can get well with you all! Thank you." That was my simple introduction, filled with confidence.

" Let's welcome her in with a round of applause," The class filled with applause, as I kept smiling observing everyone from the face. There were some sets of students who didn't bother to even look up from their phones. What are they even doing? I shrugged it off as Ms. Backer pointed out a free seat next to a very cool-looking, sporty girl. I went to the appointed seat and sat, looking at her hoping she would look at me. But my bad, she was looking outside of the window with a very dull expression.

" Hi, I'm Aleccia, you can call me Alex!" The girl in front of my bench turned over with a warm smile. Just as she introduced herself, the girl beside her turned over and introduced herself as Kate Miller in a very polite manner. I smiled back at both, greeting. At the interval everyone seemed to be saying "hi" to me and introducing themselves except my desk mate and some other weirdos. Among everyone, Alex and Kate seemed to be very close. They took me on a school tour, and we talked for like hours, and we seemed to be taking the same exact classes this year which makes me closer to both of them. The cool girl seemed to be taking the same classes as us, but never spoke a word, every time I tried, she would just stay like she's deaf and ignore. That's so rude of her. While we were taking the PT period;

" Who is she?" I spit out, being as annoyed as ever by her attitude.

" Who?" Kate asked, looking around. I pointed out at her, who was doing stretching's at the corner of the ground, isolating herself.

" Oh, she? She seems to have some serious family problems. She was a good kid back then; we all liked her but she- she suddenly started isolating herself as we grew up. Some says that her brother died in car accident, which led her into that. But no one knows the truth." Alex mumbled; the last part was barely even audible.

At the interval, as we all went to the cafeteria, we three sat together all laughing and getting to know each other. After some minutes, Kate, out of nowhere, started smiling at the phone, probably reading a funny meme.

" Did you all see the pictures of the new senior going all around the school blog?" She asked, excitedly, " Oh my god, I saw it like five minutes ago, he seems so cool right! I think he will be a big trouble for Daniel, maybe he'd lose all his attraction now," Alex replied with the same energy.

" Hannah, did you see him?" Kate asked, looking at me,

" Daniel guy or the senior?"

"Of course, The senior, don't even thinking of meeting Daniel." She sounded so serious.

"Why, is he that bad?"

"Girl, He almost rules this high school with his bunch of rich buddies. Freshmans definitely go through such a hard time with him around. Even the principal is afraid of him,"

"Ah really," I paused, thinking of how different this school seemed to be compared to my old one, there was a boy who's also known as a bad guy, but he did all the trouble making and silly stuff, not anything serious like this Daniel guy, Kate was jabbering about.

"So, you mean the senior... Nope," I answered, not being bothered at any cost.

There I heard some footsteps of a few students stepping towards us and taking seats right next to our table, and that's exactly where Kate and Alex started squealing, I looked up at them, clearly confused.

" Oh God! That's him!" They both were fangirling over a guy sitting next to us on the table, I stopped eating and wanted to look at the so-called cool guy, so I traced their eyesight, expecting to see a breathtaking guy, except I saw Derik. Hell no. So,

he was the cool senior they were squealing all about. I pretended not to see him, and turned my head down, again focusing on my food while Alex and Kate were observing every move of him like two crazy, obsessed fans. Not only them, but there were also a few girls around our age or even younger looking at him, with the same expression as Alex and Kate. Is he Justin Bieber to get this much attention wherever he appeared? I wish I had that power. After school, my father pulled up in his sleek, new Ferrari to pick me up. I hesitated before climbing in, scanning the surroundings to ensure no prying eyes lingered.

"Hey sweetie, how was your first day?" my dad asked as I settled into the car.

"Great!" I replied, gazing outside through the window slats just in time to see Derik exit the school building, a cluster of friends orbiting around him. He exchanged waves with them before slipping into the car.

"Seems like you've been making quite a few friends," my dad commented, his fingers dancing over the ignition. He seemed to be proud that his son is getting along with the changes.

"Yeah, Dad, can I ask you something?" Derik's voice held a hint of hopeful anticipation.

"What's on your mind?" My dad's eyes met Derik's through the rearview mirror.

"Since I've turned 17 now, is it possible for me to start driving a car?"

My dad pondered for a moment. "Hmm... Yeah, sure."

"Really?!" Derik's jubilation was almost palpable.

"Yes, but with one condition."

Derik's excitement seemed to hang in suspense. "What's the condition?"

"You'll need to drop your sister off at school and pick her up after."

"No way!" I exclaimed from the backseat, my outburst cutting through their conversation. My dad shot a stern look at me through the rearview mirror, while Derik appeared equally puzzled.

"Why?" Derik asked, his eyes shifting between my dad and me.

I remained silent, staring out the window slats to evade the question.

I leaned against the window frame, as I often did when I needed to avoid certain discussions. It seemed my dad understood my silent plea, as he refrained from pressing further. However, his worry was evident in the occasional glances he cast my way through the rearview mirror, a quiet check to ensure I was okay.

That night, I was in my room, playing the Guitar trying my best to escape the reality, someone knocked on the door and then Kylie stepped in with a slight smile.

" Hey girly!" She came, sitting on the edge of my bed.

"Hey, what's up?" I asked, still playing some smooth melodies on my guitar.

" Well, I came to let you know that I will be moving to California tomorrow."

" What? You didn't even-"

" I know, I know, I wanted to tell you later as I don't want to see you worrying over it. I won't be able to fly here anytime soon but we need to keep in touch. Okay?" she asked looking directly into my eyes. I don't know what to think right now! Everything seemed to be turning upside down. I placed my guitar beside me, leaning closer to Kylie resting my head on her shoulder.

" I hope you could stay." I let out. I know, as a sister I should be proud of her and congratulate and support her this time but- I can't.

" Aww, but sissy, I should leave. It's not like I'm going to another country, I'm just flying to another state. I would try my best to take visits on vacations. Okay?"

" Promise?"

" I swear" She promised, throwing her arms around me, pulling me closer. My eyes began to well up in tears at the thought of not seeing her around the house anymore.

"Shh, don't cry," she comforted, switching to a playful tone. "And that so-called 'Mr. Heartthrob' better be treating my little princess well. If he messes up, he's in for a lesson or two!" Her words were laced with humor, an attempt to lighten the heaviness in the room. I managed to smile, looking up at her. We just sat there, locked in a quiet connection.

" Sissy, even though we could be miles apart, we should be facetimeing each other every day, gossiping. Okay?" I nodded with a slight smile playing on the edge of my lips.

That night, the two of us just sat together, engrossed in conversation. It felt like we were treating it as if it might be our last chance to ever talk. The room was quiet, and the soft light created a comforting atmosphere, and we shared stories and laughs, cherishing each word as if it were something precious. Even though we were having a good time, there was a bit of sadness underneath it all. We both knew that this might be the end of our talks like this for several months. It was as if we were trying to say goodbye without actually saying it in words.

TWO

As the days went by, Kylie was already gone for college, leaving me here in our big house, a place that now felt emptier than before. Kylie was such a keeper; she always fulfilled her promises no matter what. So, just as she promised, we both kept in touch with each other almost every day except for those days when she goes out with her friends. Facetiming her didn't always feel good, sometimes when I was gossiping about all the things happening in my life, she seemed to be dozing off. Maybe her workload was to blame, and I might seem like a complaining younger sister, but it didn't feel alright for me.

Amidst everything, Kate and Alex stood by my side like pillars of support. Our lunch breaks turned into little pockets of joy, where we'd gather and share stories, giggles, and nonsense that seemed to lighten the load of the world. In the midst of our talks, there was a recurring theme—the school's heartthrob, Derik. He practically had his own album on the school blog, along with his good-looking squad who practically ruled the high-school. The whole scene was like something out of a Netflix movie, and honestly, it kind of got on my nerves. Even my brother was part of this whole drama, basking in their popularity.

But there was a twist to their story. Behind the glamour and glitz, there was a darker side. Instead of being all cool and friendly, their popularity often turned into a way

to make others uncomfortable. They didn't use physical force, but they had this knack for teasing and making the quieter, studious kids feel out of place. I'm quite worried about the fact that Derik was now involved in all of that.

"Did you hear that Derik joined the basketball team?" Kate's voice broke through the chatter.

"What?" I almost choked on my own breath. Derik had been an avid basketball player, but he suffered a severe leg injury a while ago. The doctors were clear that he shouldn't participate in sports involving heavy footwork. Is he out of his mind?

"Why the surprise, girl? With his height, I can totally imagine him being a pro," Alex chimed in between bites of her sandwich.

"Definitely," I managed a forced smile before staring down at my food, suddenly losing my appetite.

Ever since Dad gave Derik that fancy sports car, it had become a part of our daily routine that he would leave the school and park the car at the edge of the driveway, and I would sneak inside it after he left, fooling everyone.

"You hate me that much?" he began, his stern gaze fixed on the road.

"What?"

"You hate me, right? That's why you never introduce me as your brother," he stated, his tone almost accusatory.

"Oh gosh, it's not like that—"

"Then?"

"It's just that... I don't want fake friends hanging around me just because they want to get to you," I sighed, my eyes wandering to the outside world, a habit I had in uncomfortable situations. I could feel his eyes on me as I kept staring outside. Then, a long, heavy sigh.

"At least you don't hate me," he muttered, his attention back on the road. The silence grew overpowering, and I felt compelled to shatter it.

"What do you think you're doing?" I blurted out suddenly, catching him off guard.

"Driving?"

"Not that, you silly!" A small chuckle escaped me, earning a faint smile from him. But just as quickly, I resumed my stern expression, locking my gaze with his. "Heard you made it onto the basketball team."

"Ah, that," he replied, a hint of pensiveness in his tone. Silence hung in the air for a while.

"How can you be so reckless? What if you hurt yourself again? What if you end up breaking your leg? What if—" My barrage of worries was interrupted by Derik's aggravating laughter.

"I'm fine, alright?"

"How can you possibly know that when you haven't even played yet?"

"I just know, Hannah."

"But you don't know! What if—" I paused, scrambling for a way to deter him from playing basketball.

"I'll tell Mom about this!" I blurted out, resorting to my role as the classic younger sister.

"Please don't! This is my life, Hannah. This is what I was born to do. It's been almost two years since the injury, and I can even run now. Playing basketball won't make it worse."

What a stubborn guy he could be.

"Sorry, but until you get a medical degree, I can't buy into that argument. As someone with a medical science diploma advised you earlier, I can repeat to you that engaging in sports which require intensive footwork with your post-injury can indeed make things worse."

"But this isn't football," he mumbled, taken aback.

"Still, basketball demands a lot of footwork!" I countered.

"Okay, fine. I'll be careful! Please, just don't tell Mom or Dad about this. Please," he practically begged. It was an unusual sight; he'd never pleaded with me like this before. Even if I threatened to complain to Mom, he'd brush it off nonchalantly. But this time, he seemed genuinely desperate. His passion for basketball was undeniable,

and I found myself unable to let him down. Reluctantly, I agreed to keep his secret safe.

The next day, during the lunch break, I found myself sitting alone under a tree, strumming the guitar rhythmically and humming a tune I'd been working on. As I continued playing being lost in my own world like I'd always do, I heard a faint sound joined in, it's melodious whistle that blended seamlessly with my music. I looked up, surprised, to find a boy around my age standing. He had hazel brown eyes, and his messy brunette hair was almost covering his forehead. He had such a warm smile playing on his lips as he was gazing down upon me.

"Hey, sorry if I startled you," he said, in a very inviting and warm voice.

I grinned back, "No problem, I've never had such a musical accompaniment like that."

He chuckled, "Well, you're playing was just too good to resist." He stepped closer, settling onto the grass beside me with a polite yet relaxed distance, his posture displaying a sense of discipline.

"I'm Hannah." I introduced myself, extending my hand for a friendly handshake, which he gladly accepted with a charming smile. "Lucus,"

"So, Lucus, do you always accompany random guitar players with your whistling?" I teased.

He laughed, settling himself more comfortably on the grass being relaxed.

"Only the ones who play as beautifully as you." I was flattered by his genuine compliments.

"Thank you." I smiled. He stayed silent for a while looking up at the blue sky, where clouds were enjoying their freedom, floating all around. "Please continue." was all he said and then at the next moment, he closed his eyes as I started strumming the rhythm along with a hum.

Even though he seemed to be sleeping, his whistling sound kept the vibe. After playing the guitar for a while, I stopped looking down at the figure laying on the grassland, as if it was his first time. He looked so peaceful, with eyes closed. While I was observing the resting yet unknown figure lying beside me, I caught a bruise closer to his defined jawline, it seemed so new and fresh. Who punched him? Did

he get into a fight with someone? Questions came flooding as I kept observing his whole existence.

" Don't you feel tired of staring at me?" His sudden question caught me off guard, and our eyes met, I felt embarrassed.

" I just- ah- anyway, who are you?" I asked, changing the subject smoothly.

" A human." His sarcasm was overwhelming. I gave him a seriously kind of look.

" Just kidding man, chill! I am Lucus Ketchkin."

" I was not asking for your name, wait! Did you just say KETCHKIN!" I almost screamed.

" Shh- can you be a bit more silent. I don't like much attention." He paused, looking up at the empty sky again. "Yeah, yeah, the famous singer and actor Liam Ketchkin's youngest son." he said in a very monotonous tone. Oh, my heavens, what the hell am I hearing right now? I am sitting on this grass land with a celeb's son? No freaking way this could be a reality. I was so excited to speak that my words kept jumbling.

" You- Oh my- You are his son?!" I asked, questioning the obvious as I was hard for me to process. He just nodded, still staring up at the blank sky.

" What are you doing in a public school?"

" Good question," He sat up, leaning against the tree. Finally, those hazel brown eyes were meeting mine. He took a long breath like he was about to tell me something but then, he sighed heavily breaking the eye contact.

" It's okay, if you don't want to tell me." I assured him as he seemed to be very uncomfortable now.

" No, It's not like that... It's just- I don't know." He sighed again, what happened to the boy who had a charming smile? The awkward silence of me waiting for an answer and he probably thinking how to answer was spreading whereas it's getting a bit uncomfortable for both of us.

" Anyway, do you play any sort of a musical instrument?" I questioned, breaking the thick air, trying to change the subject smoothly. His face seemed to be lit up as I started talking about something else.

" Yeah, I play the piano."

" Cool, we should have a jamming session sometime." I suggested with a smile.

" I know right." He agreed, nodding.

" Sorry but I think I need to go now, have a history class coming up, if I'd miss that, it'll be the end of my life and we won't be able to have another jamming session" I joked, as I stood up gathering all my belongings, I could hardly walk straight with all the things I'm carrying.

" May I give you a hand," He offered, standing up. Such a gentleman he is,

"No, no, it's totally fine!" I said, "See you around!" I said as I walked past him towards my class.

"Bye!" I heard him shouting behind me, I just looked around nodding and continued my way to the class. As I reached it, the class had already started, Ms. Katherine was in the middle of the lesson. She is the kind of a person who doesn't like to be interrupted while she is digging into the lesson. I entered the class slowly, trying not to interrupt her flow.

"Excuse me, Miss,"

"You're not excused, young lady," Ms. Katherine responded, peering over her old spectacles. The stern frown on her face was quite formidable.

"Why are you late?" she inquired.

"Ah, I got lost," I lied, hoping my excuse would pass.

"That's quite a creative excuse, but *sigh * alright, this is your last chance," she relented.

"Thank you so much, Miss," I said with exaggerated politeness before making my way to my seat behind Kate.

"Someone's lucky today," Kate playfully nudged me as I settled in.

Indeed, I was. Today turned out to be surprisingly fortunate—I met a celebrity's child and escaped the clutches of our most stern teacher. After history class, Kate and I were walking down the hallway when we noticed a crowd of students gathered,

cheering animatedly. We squeezed our way through to the front, eager to see what was happening.

HELL NO.

There was Derik along with a few other guys engaged in a heated fight. Derik had thrown a punch, sending a guy tumbling to the ground, almost hitting his head. If he hit his head, he might have died at the point. WHAT IS HE EVEN DOING? Trying to kill people?

The girls gathered around them were cheering him on, but my dear brother seemed that he isn't satisfied that he launched himself at the guy, punching him all over. Panic surged within me, urging me to intervene, but the crowd was too dense. I grabbed Kate's hand and pulled her out of the chaotic scene.

"Hannah, what's going on?" Kate asked, her confusion evident.

"W-we need to prepare for chemistry, don't we? No time for watching bulls duke it out," I stammered, concocting a reason to escape.

"Bulls? They're the most popular guys here," Kate said, her disappointment palpable. Then her tone shifted to excitement, as she added, "I'm totally on Derik's side! How about you?"

"GOSH, you're picking sides now? Do you even know what's happening here?" I retorted.

"I know Derik's always right. He's like the definition of perfection. So, in this case, he's the right one."

"Did you even bother to find out why they're fighting before you decided who's right?" I shot back.

"I know Derik's always right."

"Just like that."

"Hey, let's not fight over some guys," Kate said, placing her hand on my shoulder.

"Yeah, Totally, we shouldn't be arguing over some dumb seniors, it is pretty lame," I replied, turning and running off.

"They're not dumb, Hannah!" Kate called out, chasing after me.

That was how our friendship worked—engaging in silly arguments over trivial matters, only to forget and move on shortly after. In chemistry class, amid our experiments, an announcement came over the PA system.

"Quick announcement: Derik Alsher and Rick Jorden, report to the principal's office immediately."

Oh, he was going to face serious consequences this time. He should never have let it escalate like that.

After school, as usual, the car was parked at the edge of the driveway. I got into the passenger seat, my expression displaying my intention to pin the blame on Derik for his actions. As I entered, I didn't greet him or even look at him. My gaze remained fixed on the world outside.

"You shouldn't have done that! How could you beat up someone so brutally? You acted like a total monster back there. Do you have any idea, how ashamed I am? Thank God, no one knows me as your sister. You shouldn't have—"

My words were abruptly cut off by a thud. I glanced over to see Derik's head had collided with the steering wheel, the impact sounding harsh.

"STOP!" I exclaimed, grabbing his shoulder back to prevent him from hitting himself again. He remained hunched over for a few minutes before finally raising his head. It was then that I noticed the bruises on his face—red marks scattered across his skin, some of them stained with the remnants of dried blood. He'd been hurt too.

"Derik, I'm so sor—" I began, only to be interrupted again. This time, it wasn't a thud or a word. It was the silence that hung in the car, heavy and unbearable, like a storm gathering strength before unleashing its fury.

Tears welled up in his eyes, and his voice trembled as he whispered,

"You're ashamed of me?"

The weight of his words bore into my heart, and I turned to look at him, stunned by the vulnerability in his gaze. His eyes were the same shade of blue as our mother's, and in that moment, they mirrored a pain I had never imagined I could inflict.

"No, Derik, it's not like that," I stammered, my voice quivering. I reached out to touch his arm, but he flinched away from my hand as if my touch were acid

"You think I'm a monster, don't you?" he said, his voice breaking. "You think I'm *monster...*"

Tears streamed down his face, mingling with the bruises and the dried blood. He was a broken mess, and I played as the main role in breaking him.

"No, no, that's not it at all," I said, my own eyes filling with tears. "I was just worried about you. I didn't want you to get hurt."

But my words felt empty and inadequate. How could I convince him of my sincerity when my initial reaction had betrayed him so cruelly?

"I thought you were different, Hannah," he choked out, wiping away his tears with the back of his hand. "I thought you were the one person who would never judge me, who would always have my back."

The weight of his disappointment pressed down on me, a burden I could barely bear. I had hurt the one person who meant more to me than anyone else in the world, and there was no way to undo it.

"I'm so sorry, Derik," I whispered, my voice barely audible. "I never should have reacted that way. I should have been there for you, no matter what."

"It's okay, Hannah. But you should've asked why I fought him before jumping to conclusions," he said, his gaze a mix of pain and frustration. I could see he was hurting, both physically and emotionally. Guilt swelled within me as I realized how quickly I'd judged him without knowing the full story.

"I'm sorry, Derik. I shouldn't have made assumptions like that," I admitted, a lump forming in my throat. "Can you tell me what actually happened now?"

He took a deep breath, his eyes returning to the road. "Rick and I have been at odds since we moved here. He's been bullying younger students, making their lives miserable. I couldn't just stand by and watch anymore, so I decided to confront him today. It escalated quickly."

Listening closely, the puzzle pieces began to fit together. "But the fight... Why did it get so physical?"

Derik sighed heavily, his voice carrying a weight of sadness. "His father works at the same company as Dad. When Dad got promoted, it seemed to affect his father's position negatively. Rick said some hurtful things about our dad. Those comments crossed a line, and I lost control, Hannah. I'm not proud of it."

His voice held a note of remorse. My anger began to subside, replaced by genuine concern for my brother. "Are you alright?"

Derik's grip on the steering wheel tightened, his knuckles turning white. "No, Hannah, I'm not alright," he admitted, his voice trembling. "I feel like a failure, not just as a brother but as a person. And knowing that you're ashamed of me... that's the hardest part to bear."

My heart ached with each word he spoke, and I struggled to hold back my own tears. The bond between us had always been strong, and to see it strained like this tore at my soul.

"I'm so sorry, Derik," I whispered, feeling utterly helpless. "I was wrong to react that way. I should have been more understanding and supportive."

Derik glanced at me, his eyes reflecting a mixture of emotions. "I don't want your pity, Hannah. I just want you to believe in me, to know that I'm not a monster."

"I do believe in you, Derik," I said earnestly. "I know you have a good heart, and you've always protected me. It's just... I got scared when I saw you fighting like that. I didn't want you to get hurt."

Derik let out a sigh, and some of the tension in his shoulders seemed to ease. "I understand, Hannah. But I need you to trust me. I promise I'll never let things escalate like that again. I just couldn't stand by and let him disrespect our dad."

His voice held a sincerity that resonated deep within me. I knew that my brother wasn't a monster, but rather a young man who felt a deep sense of responsibility and loyalty to our family.

I reached out and gently placed my hand on his shoulder this time. "I'm proud of you, Derik. And I'll always have your back, no matter what."

Derik managed a weak smile, a glimmer of hope returning to his eyes. "Thank you, Hannah. That means everything to me."

I leaned back in my seat, the tension between us slowly dissipating. The setting sun cast a warm orange glow across the horizon as we pulled into our driveway.

"Hey, let's promise to communicate better from now on," I suggested.

He smiled genuinely this time. "Deal. And I promise to think before I act too."

I chuckled. "That's a good start."

As we walked into the house together, I realized that despite our differences, Derik and I were in this together. We were siblings, after all, and no matter how many disagreements we had, our bond was unbreakable.

At night while I was on a video call with my sister, Kylie, sharing all the gossip. I heard my mom's voice from down the stairs calling us for dinner. I excused Kylie and went down the stairs;

"Where's your brother dear?" My mom asked as I took a seat at the dinner table where my dad was already sitting waiting for us.

"In his room, I guess."

"Wait, I'll go check on him." Then, my mom went up the stairs to my brother's room.

Oh shit, maybe he's trying not to show his bruises to mom, I quickly went up the stairs and grab her from the forearm pulling her back,

"No need to worry mom, I'll go check on him." I volunteered.

"It's okay honey, go sit on the table I'll talk him out."

"No need mom, go and take a seat on the table, please."

My mom seemed to be so confused by my actions as she sat down at the dinner table. I quickly ran to my brother's room, knocking on the door.

"Derik, are you okay?" I called out gently.

The door creaked open, and I found my brother sitting on his bed, his face buried in his hands. When he looked up at me, I could see the pain in his eyes. He seemed

vulnerable, not like the confident and sometimes arrogant brother I often clashed with.

I walked in, closing the door behind me. "Hey," I said softly, taking a seat beside him. "You know, Mom is looking for you and she seemed to be a bit worried."

He let out a humorless chuckle. "Yeah, I bet she is." He paused, running his fingers through his hair, "I got suspended for 2 freaking weeks, Hannah. How could I say this to them?"

I sighed, realizing that his frustration wasn't just about the fight earlier. "Derik, I know we fight a lot, but seeing you hurt like this... it bothers me more than I'd like to admit."

He looked at me, his gaze searching mine for something. Maybe a hint of sincerity or maybe an assurance that I meant what I said. "Hannah, you have a funny way of showing that you care."

I smiled weakly. "Yeah, I guess I do. But deep down, I do care."

He let out a long sigh, and for a moment, the tension in the room seemed to ease. "You know, I've always admired your determination, your strong will. You're not afraid to speak your mind, even if it means challenging me."

I raised an eyebrow in surprise. "You admire that about me?"

He nodded. "Yeah. I may not always show it, but I've learned a lot from you."

I chuckled. "Well, I've learned a lot from you too, even if it's what not to do most of the time."

He grinned, and it was a genuine smile, free from any pretense. "Fair enough."

"Look, about the fight today," I started, "I'm sorry for jumping to conclusions. I should've asked you first before accusing you."

Derik sighed, running a hand through his hair. "I should've known better too. Sometimes I let my anger get the best of me."

"You know, having this conversation with you, I came to know that there's a lot more of you than meets the eye," I said, nudging his shoulder playfully.

He rolled his eyes but couldn't hide a small smile. "Yeah, yeah, whatever."

We sat in silence for a while, the air between us lightening. It was strange, being in such a genuine moment with my brother, especially after all the arguments we'd had recently.

"So, you really care about me?" he asked, his tone almost hesitant.

I nudged him again. "Yeah, you big dummy. But don't let that go to your head."

He laughed, a real, hearty laugh that seemed to fill the room with warmth. "Thanks, Hannah."

"Anytime," I replied, getting up from the bed. "Now, come on, let's go downstairs before Mom starts to worry more. Take a deep breath and let it out." He just nodded.

As Derik and I walked down the stairs together, I could feel a knot of unease forming in my stomach. We had just had a heart-to-heart conversation, and now we are about to reveal something that would likely disrupt the fragile calm that had settled between us.

As we entered the dining room, Mom and Dad were already seated at the table, exchanging small talk. They looked up as we approached, and I could see their expressions change from casual conversation to surprise, confusion, and worry in a matter of seconds.

"Derik, Honey, what happened to your face?" Mom stood up, stepping towards him. Mom's voice was laced with concern as her eyes fixated on Derik's bruised and slightly swollen face.

Dad's eyebrows furrowed as he also noticed the marks. "Yeah, what's going on? Did you get into some sort of trouble?"

I exchanged a quick glance with Derik before taking a deep breath. "Well, you see, there was a fight at school today," I admitted, feeling guilty for revealing the truth.

Mom took Derik's hand. "A fight? Derik, what happened?"

Derik shifted uncomfortably, his gaze dropping to the floor. "It wasn't a big deal, just some misunderstanding that got out of hand."

Dad's jaw tightened, and I could see a mix of disappointment and concern in his eyes. "Misunderstanding or not, fighting is never the solution, Derik. You should know better."

Derik nodded; his expression filled with regret. "I know, Dad. I messed up. Plus, I- I- um-" Derik gulped, struggling with his words.

" Just say it." Dad said in a very stern voice.

"I- I got suspended from school for two weeks. I'm so sorry."

Mom's eyes widened, and her hand went to her chest as if to steady herself then she sighed, "I can't believe this. We've always taught you to handle things with maturity and not resort to violence."

I bit my lip, feeling the weight of the situation pressing down on all of us. "I should've stopped him," I interjected, feeling responsible for not intervening earlier.

Dad sighed, his stern expression softening just a bit. "Well, at least you're owning up to your mistakes, both of you."

Derik finally looked up, meeting Dad's gaze. "I'm sorry, Dad. I let my anger get the best of me."

Dad's tone softened as he placed a hand on Derik's shoulder. "Just remember that violence doesn't solve anything. You're better than that."

Mom nodded in agreement. "We're concerned about your well-being, Derik. And not just physically, but emotionally too. If something is bothering you, you should talk to us."

Derik nodded, and there was genuine ruefulness in his eyes. "I will. I promise."

I couldn't help but feel a sense of relief that Mom and Dad were approaching the situation with understanding, even if they were disappointed in Derik's actions. The tense atmosphere seemed to gradually ease as we continued the conversation.

The conversation gradually shifted to lighter topics, as if we were all trying to find a way to move past the tension. Mom started talking about a good student who is actively participating in her biology class and about her personality, and Dad chimed in with his thoughts on a book about guiding towards the success of a company that he had been reading. I shared a funny incident from school, hoping to lighten the mood as much as I could.

Derik, still nursing his bruised face, finally spoke up. "I'm really sorry, you guys. I messed up today. It won't happen again." He didn't seem to get over it yet.

Mom reached over to touch his hand gently. "We know you're sorry, Derik. Just remember that we're here to support you, no matter what."

Dad nodded in agreement. "And we're glad you're okay. It could have been much worse."

"I promise to be more responsible, Dad," Derik said earnestly.

After dinner, as we were clearing the table, Mom turned to Derik. "You know, it's okay to be upset or angry, but there are better ways to deal with those emotions."

Derik met her gaze, his expression filled with sincerity. "I'll remember that, Mom."

"Good," Mom replied with a warm smile. "And if you ever need to talk about anything, don't hesitate to come to us."

As the evening progressed, the atmosphere in our home seemed to shift from tension to understanding. We were a family facing challenges, but we were also a family learning to navigate through them together.

Later that night, as I was getting ready for bed, Derik knocked on my door softly. I opened it, and He seemed so tired and worn out by everything happened less that within twenty-four hours.

"Hey," he said, leaning against the doorframe.

I smiled, appreciating the effort he was making to bridge the gap between us. "Hey."

He sighed, running a hand through his hair. "I really messed up today, didn't I?" He's bringing it up again. We talked this out but still- he's regretting highly. I walked over to him, placing a reassuring hand on his shoulder.

"Yeah, you did. But you're also learning from it."

Derik looked down, his expression a mix of regret and determination. "I am. I don't want to be that guy who resorts to violence. And be the devil in our school. "

I nodded, proud of his realization. "You're not that guy. You're my brother, and you're better than that and don't think that you'll ever turn out to be the devil of our school cause even when you were on top of that guy, beating the hell of him, all the

girls were cheering you, completely fangirling over your actions. Despite this, my friend, Katie was arguing about you being the good guy in the situation without even knowing what had happened."

"Really? Am I that charming?" He said with a smile dancing on the edge of his lips, lighting up the whole room.

" Exactly, but don't let that get into your tiny little brain, which you don't even have I guess"

" Like you have it, chubs."

" Don't you dare call me that!" I shouted, jumping on to him, making him almost lost his balance. He winced as he moved back.

" Oh, sorry bro I forgot."

" That's alright."

He finally met my gaze, a hint of a smile tugging at the corners of his lips. "Thanks, Hannah. For giving me a reality check."

I chuckled, giving his shoulder a playful squeeze. "Anytime, bro."

We stood there in silence for a moment, the unspoken understanding between us growing stronger. It was moments like these that reminded me of the bond we shared as siblings.

"Goodnight, Derik," I said, breaking the silence.

"Goodnight, Hannah," he replied, turning to leave.

As he closed the door behind him, I couldn't help but feel a sense of hopefulness about our future as siblings, growing up will make us even closer, I guess.

THREE

The next morning, the sun poured in through my window, casting a warm glow that seemed to reflect the newfound warmth in our family. As I stretched and yawned, I couldn't help but feel a sense of contentment. The events of yesterday had brought us closer together, reminding me of the importance of family in times of trouble.

Preparations for school were punctuated by an atmosphere of camaraderie. As I headed downstairs with my backpack slung over my shoulder, a heartwarming sight greeted me. Mom was seated at the counter, and Derik was bustling around, preparing breakfast. Their laughter and easy conversation painted a picture of a weight lifted off their shoulders. Dad, meanwhile, sat at the dinner table, absorbed in some work, probably his office tasks.

"Good morning, Hannah," Mom chimed, looking up from her seat.

"Good morning," I replied, my smile mirroring the warmth in the room.

Mom playfully rolled her eyes. "Apologies in advance, dear. Breakfast might be a bit delayed today. Your brother is in charge, and he's not letting me lift a finger."

I chuckled, sitting next to mom, "Hope it'll be worth the wait. You better hurry up, bro."

"I'm on it, Miss." Derik grinned, his hands expertly flipping a pancake on the griddle.

My gaze drifted to the yellow, duck-themed, cute apron he was wearing. "You look adorable in that," I teased, unable to resist.

Derik's eyes widened in mock indignation. "Hey, watch it, chubs."

"Don't you dare call me that!" I shot back, jumping onto him playfully, almost making him lose his balance.

I winced slightly as he stepped back onto my feet. "Oh, sorry, sis."

"That's alright." I grinned, teasingly brushing some imaginary dust off his apron.

Mom looked at us with a fond smile. "You two never change."

"Mom, it's all her," Derik said with an exaggerated sigh, pointing at me.

I rolled my eyes. "Yeah, right. Blame the innocent one."

Dad finally looked up from his work, a small smile playing on his lips. "Breakfast and a show. What more could I ask for?"

"I should snap this moment," I took a photo of him in the silliest pause ever. "Wait, I'll post this on the school blog anonymously,"

"You better be joking,"

"Too bad, I'm not,"

"Hannah, posting your brother's photos on the school blog won't be suitable, right?" Mom said,

"Mom, the school blog has already become Derik's now,"

"What?" Mom sounded confused.

"The girls at school were acting like paparazzi posting every photo of Derik at school." I responded, showing her the school blog, AKA Derik's photo album. Mom was quite surprised.

"That's my boy! Those girls better be at distance." Mom jested, nudging my arm.

"Thanks for the protectiveness," he retorted in mock appreciation. "Here you go." He effortlessly transferred two pancakes onto my plate, handing me the honey bottle.

With breakfast shared and laughter echoing through the kitchen, Derik drove me to school. The drive was quiet but comfortable, accompanied by soothing music that created a reassuring backdrop. The familiar spot at school was soon occupied by the car, and I stepped out, waving goodbye to Derik.

"Have a good day at school, chubs!" he called out before the car pulled away. I returned the wave and made my way toward the school building.

The day at school flowed smoothly, and during lunch break, I found myself in the cafeteria again, sitting across from Lukas, who was alone.

"Excuse me, mind if we join you?" I asked politely, snapping him out of his thoughts.

He nodded, and my friends Kate and Alex took seats beside me. I introduced them to Lukas, and though he seemed slightly distant, he greeted them with a friendly smile. As lunch continued, Kate and Alex excused themselves for their next class, leaving me alone with Lukas.

"So, how's life?" I asked casually, attempting to initiate a conversation. However, Lukas appeared slightly annoyed or distracted by something.

"Did you talk about me to those girls?" he asked, his tone a mix of curiosity and suspicion.

I blinked in surprise. "Yeah, they're my friends."

He sighed, relief evident on his face. "Why? I thought you wouldn't spill anything about me."

I frowned, puzzled by his reaction. "What do you mean? I just told them you joined me under the tree while I was playing music."

His shoulders relaxed, and he managed a smile. "Thanks, Hannah. I don't really like attention, that's all."

"Mind if I ask you something?" I hesitated, waiting for his nod before continuing. "What happened to your cheek, Lukas?"

He seemed taken aback, avoiding eye contact as he brushed off the question. "Ah, well, it's just a minor thing. Nothing to worry about."

Before I could press further, he stood up abruptly, his demeanor slightly anxious. "Got to go, have a class now."

"Okay, bye," I replied, watching him disappear down the hallway. Lukas remained a mystery, much like my desk mate. I wondered if he was facing some kind of trouble, despite his status as the son of a celebrity.

Shrugging off my thoughts, I headed back to class, where I received a warm reprimand from the teacher for being late, along with a friendly suggestion to ask a friend for missed notes.

Turning to my desk mate, I initiated a request. "May I—"

She slid her book toward me without looking up. "Thanks," I murmured appreciatively. Throughout the whole lecture I was trying to keep up with her as I missed some of it, the basics.

After an exhausting day at school, I made my way toward the usual spot where Derik parked our car. As I strolled down the sidewalk, something caught my eye on the other side of the road. There was Lucas, engaged in what seemed like a heated argument with a man who appeared oddly familiar. Lucas appeared agitated, gesticulating animatedly, while the man stood impassively, his black hat and sunglasses giving off an air of annoyance. Surrounding them were a few imposing figures in sharp suits.

Could it be? OH MY-

I couldn't help but wonder if the man in question was none other than Liam, Lucas's father, the renowned singer, actor, and runway model. The realization hit me like a ton of bricks. As I walked across the street, my curiosity was provoked. As I got closer, I could see that the man with Lucas was indeed Liam Ketchkin, his father. However, it wasn't just his appearance that caught my attention; it was the intensity of their argument.

Lucas's face was flushed with anger, his hazel brown eyes were not that sweet anymore, his eye color seemed to be darkened. They were locked in a heated

exchange with his father. The suited men, who might be their bodyguards seemed to be uncomfortable of the situation, glancing at each other as if unsure how to intervene.

I hesitated for a moment, unsure if I should approach. But then, my concern for Lucas overtook my hesitation, and I stepped closer to the scene, trying to catch snippets of their conversation.

"—just want to be a normal kid!" Lucas was saying, his voice tinged with frustration.

Liam Ketchkin's expression was stern as he replied, "You know very well that you're not like other kids, Lucas. You have responsibilities, and you can't just run away from them. Why can't you be like your brother for a moment?"

"Cause I'M NOT HIM DAD! I'm tired of living in your shadow!" Lucas exclaimed, his voice breaking with emotion. "I want to be myself, not one of your famous sons."

Liam's jaw tightened, and for a moment, it seemed like he might explode in anger. But then, he took a deep breath, his expression softening just slightly. "Lucas, I know I haven't been the best father. I've been consumed by my career, but it's for your future, too."

Lucas shook his head, his frustration apparent. "Dad, I am not like Jake, and don't expect me to be like him. Unlike him, I don't want attention everywhere I step, I want to make my own choices and stop living under your shadow for once."

The conversation hung in the air; tension thick between them. I could sense the conflicting emotions in both—Liam's desire to protect his son and Lucas's yearning for independence.

I felt like an intruder in such a personal moment, but I couldn't just walk away. Lucas had been friendly to me, and it seemed like he needed someone to talk to. So, I cautiously approached them.

"Lucas," I said gently, "is everything okay?"

Both Lucas and Liam turned to look at me, their expressions surprised. Lucas seemed embarrassed that I had witnessed their argument, while Liam regarded me with a hint of curiosity.

"I didn't mean to eavesdrop," I continued, "but I couldn't help overhearing." I smiled shyly.

Lucas glanced at his father, then back at me. "This is Hannah," he said to Liam.

Liam extended his hand to me, his expression softening. "I'm Liam Ketchkin, Luca's dad. Sorry if you had to witness that."

I shook his hand, feeling a bit starstruck despite the circumstances. "Nice to meet you, Mr. Ketchkin. And it's okay; everyone has their own arguments sometimes."

Lucas let out a sigh, his shoulders slumping. "Yeah, but my arguments with Dad are a bit more... complicated."

I could see the strain in their relationship, and it was clear that Lucas had been carrying a heavy burden. Liam seemed to realize this too, and he placed a hand on his son's shoulder.

"Lucas," he said, his tone softer, "we'll talk about this at home. It's not something to discuss in public. I'll get going now, I have a meeting now." He paused, sharing a friendly smile at me,

"Lucas, you better introduce her properly next time, maybe you should invite her over for a dinner or something." He said as he got into the black Range Rover, waving at us. After he left, there was an awkward silence spreading, maybe he's still embarrassed that I heard their conversation which was my fault, I shouldn't have poked their business anyway.

"Your dad seemed to be cool." I broke the silence, looking at him, waiting for a response.

"He should be." He said in a very dim and soft voice. "He's meant to be perfect in every way possible, I mean, it seemed that my whole family is perfect in their own ways while I'm here, with zero perfections."

"Who said that? You are perfect, everyone is. It's just that you are still finding yourself."

“Do you know about my brother, Jake?”

“Why not, He was all over the internet these days. His new Netflix series was just a whole another level.”

“Did you like it?”

“Yeah, everyone does.” I looked at him, and he just ignored the stare looking away.

“Hey, you know what, He might be a pro in acting, but I'm pretty aware that you could do a way better job as a musician in the industry.” He remained silent, and we both were standing at the edge of the street, staring up at the empty sky, lost in a whole another world. After a few minutes of us being lost in our own worlds, we were snapped out of our thoughts with a loud horn. I took my eyes away from the blue sky to see Derik's car parked in front of us. He rolled down the window,

"Get in; it's already late," he said, stealing glances at Lucas. I waved goodbye to Lucas and got into the car, realizing that I had unwittingly entered a battlefield – my brother's court.

“Who’s that? And why were you late?” Derik questioned us as we drove off.

“He’s one of my friends, and I- I- forgot my phone in the locker that I had to run back and grab it real soon.” I lied, looking away, outside of the shutter.

“Okay, I’d take that for today then.” He obviously knew I lied.

After a silent ride home, I got off and went inside of the house to see, a posh looking women on the sofa; was a boy around my age, maybe a bit older. What caught my eye was his stunning blonde hair that seemed to glow in the soft afternoon light filtering through the curtains. His deep blue eyes had this magnetic pull, and they were set in a face that was a mix of rugged charm and youthful appeal.

Who let these people in when my parents aren’t even at home? Maybe our housekeeper, Sam, had been instructed to allow them in.

“Hey,” I cleared my throat as I entered, gaining their attention.

“Hello,” The woman stood up, with a slight smile. “I am Emma Jhonson, I'm a close friend of your parents, we came for a visit as I got to know that you all moved here!” She had such a strong British accent.

“Oh, thank you. Did you inform our parents that you are here?”

“Yes, they are on their way back,” She replied. “Are you Hannah, dear?”

“Yes,” I said, nodding my head. The women stepped towards me and there she hugged me so tight that I almost choke.

“Oh my god!” Tears were welled up in her eyes, “ You look exactly like Ella, so pretty” The lady exclaimed, making me flatter.

“Thank you,” I mumbled, shyly. Just in a moment, Derik came into the house, playing with his car keys and whistling. As soon as he caught the glance of the strangers, he seemed to be in shock, and the blonde boy who was sitting on the sofa stood up with a genuine smile. Derik’s emotion quickly turned to happiness in a matter of a second and he had the brightest smile playing on his lips as he went running to the boy screaming; “Daniel!!!!”

Daniel? That name sounds strangely familiar... WAIT A MINUTE! IS HE?

FOUR

OH NO!

He might be the one Kate was talking about, that bad spoiled rich kid.

“Bro, it’s been so long,” Derik said as he gave that boy a bro hug, shoulder to shoulder and did a little complicated handshake. Derik knows this guy? But- How?

“I know right,” He paused, “You didn’t even tell me that you are moving here!” He complained.

“Sorry, I was kinda busy with all the changes that happened.”

“Ah- You spotlight stealer, I came to know that you dragged away my spotlight in the days I wasn’t at school. How could you!?” He joked, at least, I think he was.

“You know I’m always better, little man!” My brother snapped, as a joke, I guess.

“OHHHH! Don’t start that again, I’m all grown. Okay? Despite, you are just one year older,” He sounded so annoyed just like I am when Derik call me “Chubs” I know how irritating that is, And about his age, he’s one year older then, in his junior year of high school.

“Derik, dear, how’s your new life here?” The Lady asked, placing her hand on his shoulder,

“It’s great, I’m getting used to all the changes Mrs. Jhonson.”

“Oh boy, I’m quite happy for you and look at you, your still so polite and nice!” She paused for a second, as her gaze laid upon her son, Daniel. “But look at him, He has become such a baddie through these years. I feel so happy that Derik’s back here so I can make him associate such a polite kid like you.”

“Why do you sound worried, Mrs. Jhonson?” Derik questioned, probably confused.

“Talking about that would be a total waste of time dear,” Emma said with a worried tone.

“Why? Daniel has been a troublemaker at school?”

“Not just a silly troublemaker Derik, a total baddie. I can’t even explain it by myself, that much I’m ashamed.” Mrs. Jhonson seemed tired of it, Derik gave Daniel a stern, big brother look while Daniel seemed to be so taken aback. Oh my god, the baddie of total high school is afraid of my brother’s single look? No way.

“Oh, I forgot to introduce my little sister to you all,” Derik blurt out with a smile, breaking the thick air of the previous conversation. “She’s Hannah, a sophomore in high school.” He introduced me, as I smiled waving a hi.

“Hannah, you know who they are right?”

“No-” I trailed off, as if it’s my fault for not remembering any of them.

“No?! Maybe, you have forgotten, can’t you remember the Johansons? Who used to live next door back in hometown, like seven or eight years ago?”

“Oh sorry, I don’t.” I gave them an apologetic look.

“It’s okay dear, you were just a little kid back in those days.” I smiled.

After some moments of chatting and catching up on everything, our parents came home, and they were pretty excited and happy about meeting the Johansons. From the way they talked, the way they laughed, it was quite clear that they used to be good friends back then. Both of our mothers were in the kitchen, laughing and gossiping, they were having quite a nice time catching up. I wonder where his dad is...

“So, Daniel, I didn’t meet you in school. Why’s that?” Derik questioned, settling himself comfortably on the sofa.

“Oh- It’s just that my mother had an urgent business meeting in Europe. She was quite afraid of keeping me home alone, so they dragged us along with them. I’ll be coming to school tomorrow, maybe we could meet up then”

“ Wait, Alone? Where’s Mr. Johanson and your little sister?”

“ We’ll ignore it for a second”

“ Okay then sorry, and we won’t be able to meet up tomorrow, maybe we could hang out another day.”

“Why? You are not coming to school tomorrow?” Daniel questioned, confused.

“No, it’s just that- I’m suspended for 2 weeks.”

“What? You were such a goodie two-shoes, how did you end up getting suspended?” He asked, clearly amused.

“I got into a silly fight that’s all.”

“Whom did you fight with?”

“It’s nothing bro, it’s over. I couldn’t even remember the person I fought with,” Derik laughed, but his lie was evident. Maybe, he doesn’t want Daniel to be involved in the situation.

“I know you more than anyone and I can guarantee that you would not fight with people over silly incidents, what happened and who’s that? Tell me.” His voice deepened, with a concerned and more of a stern look.

“Gosh, I can’t even remember the exact situation, such a silly one... and anyway Hannah,” Derik paused, turning to me who was listening to their conversation feeling almost left out. “Daniel is a very good guitarist and a singer, maybe you should jam sometime. What do you think of that?” Before I could respond, Daniel cuts in;

“I don’t play anymore.”

Hearing that, Derik seemed to be in shock. “What do you mean you don’t? It was your whole life back then. What happened to your dream of becoming a famous musician?”

“It was all the past, now I’m different.”

“How? Okay... What’s your dream now then?” Derik seemed like a protective dad with his stubborn little son.

“Well- I kind of don’t have one. Who cares? I just want to enjoy the moment with all the money I could spend and not waste my time dreaming of ambitions.” He sounded like a feather floating, his life seemed to be as if he was lying on a bed of roses. I wonder if he has ever walked bare feet, such a royalty.

“Anyway, How’s your grades these days?” Okay, now I’m very sure that Derik is the dad here.

“Grades?! Oh c’mon, who cares?! I play basketball and that’s my lifeline.”

“Basketball? I also joined the team here.”

“No way, with the injury?! How could you? What if it gets worse? What if-”

“Shut up! You are overreacting just like my sister did when she heard that. It’ll be fine.”

“Like you are the doctor here,” That was just the same thing I told him about, even though Daniel is named as the ‘bad boy’ or the ‘devil’ in high school, I’m pretty sure he would be such a great friend to my big brother.

“I said the exact same thing, but he won’t listen to any,” I chimed in, trying to be a part of their conversation. Daniel turned his head towards me and gave a slight smile.

“Look, we both are concerned about you!”

“Don’t be concerned about me, when you are living such a reckless and carefree life, you said you are grown up right? Prove that, work hard.” Derik advised. Before Daniel could answer, our mother entered the living room.

“The dinner is ready!” They informed and stepped outside to the garden to invite our fathers.

The dinner was filled with laughter and joy that I almost forgot about Derik's reputation as a 'Bad boy' He seemed to be so different than his title, he was caring loving with everyone. After a few hours of catching things up, they left.

Next day, at school I was walking down the hallway heading to my first period, social studies which is one of my favorites. There we just need to do interesting research and half of my friends, including Lucus, Alex and Kate, are taking that class. So, it's probably around your comfortable space.

"Hey," I heard a strong, deep voice which was quite unrecognizable, that I turned my head to see Daniel standing there with his bag hanging on his shoulder. He was wearing a black leather jacket which more or less portrays his reputation as a bad boy or the troublemaker.

"Hey, what's up?" I replied awkwardly with a smile.

"Where's Derik? I haven't seen him yet."

"He got suspended for two weeks, can't you remember him saying that?"

"Ah- Sorry. my poor memory..." I smiled again, looking around, trying my best to find a way to escape from this conversation.

"Don't you have classes?"

"Yeah, Social Science."

"Oh, really? I'm taking the same class too. Maybe we should head-" Before I could finish my sentence, I was cut off by some popular kids whom I've seen around Derik approaching us, making all the other students get out of their way. Ugh, how I hate them.

"Hey Brooo, good to have ya back!" A brunette boy with a bit of a dark skin tone, gave Daniel a bro hug and greeted him. "Come, Let's party the day of your arrival, some seniors are throwing a party and guess what, we all are invited!"

"Good idea Sean but today-" He seemed to be hesitant.

“No buts- you never use that when it comes to parties!” The brunette boy joked wrapping his arms around Daniel’s neck. “Is it because of this new girl? C’mon, boy, don’t act so innocently. Let’s go, it’s kind of late already.”

“Okay, I’m down then!” Daniel replied with the same level of excitement in his voice while wrapping his arm around the boy’s shoulder.

“See ya later, Hanny.” Wait, what? Hanny? Ugh-

“But- what about the class?” I shouted as he along with his friends went down the hallway.

“None of your business,” I heard a girl scream back.

“I’m not talking to you!” I yelled as they disappeared around the corner, I wish she heard it. I mean, I was talking to my brother’s friend at the first place, who is she anyway? Daniel has been so different, cutting classes to sneak into parties at school hours? What is he doing even? He shouldn’t associate such friends-

“Hey girly,” I heard Kate’s voice, behind me. “What are you doing standing in the middle of the hallway?”

“No, it’s just- Nothing. I shrugged it off, stepping towards my class with Kate.

“Alright then,”

In my social science class, everyone was engaged in a group activity. Me, Kate, and Alex were teamed up and we are discussing about a project, actually I was not involved in it, I was busy in my own world thinking of how people could change so easily because of certain external impacts.

“ Hannah?” I snapped out of my thoughts as I heard, Alex’s voice.

“ Yeah?”

“What do you think of it?” Kate asked me, narrowing her eyes as if she’s judging my whole existence.

“ Sorry Kate, I was zoned out!”

“ Knew it, What bothers you Hannah? You know you can tell us anything,”

“ I know, I know, It’s just that...” I told them everything about Daniel and him being my brother’s best friend but nothing about Lukas, I will keep my word forever. They were surprised by two facts, One is that that my brother being the school’s heartthrob, Derik Elsher and the fact that he associate the school’s baddie Daniel Jhonson.

“ Gosh, You were hiding all that?!” Kate sounded a bit hurt.

“ Yeah, it’s not that I wanted to hide thing from you all, it’s mainly that in my previous school I was quite popular as the sibling of Derik Elsher and lot of girls were friends with me for the sake of meeting him. I was so sick of all that. I needed a true friend. I’m sorry that I lied.”

“ It’s alright everything’s not perfect, I’m glad that you found not only one friend but two.” Alex said, wrapping her arms around me in a warm hug and soon Kate joined in and we all were wrapped up in hands of true friendship in a middle of the class.

“ Excuse me, will you all keep it quite, this is a class and I gave you time to discuss the project not your personal stuff.” I hear our teachers voice calling on us. We quickly sat down with bright smiles. After that period, Alex went for her Japanese class while me and Kate took seats in our French class.

“ So, about Daniel, what were you worried of him?” Kate started in a very serious tone.

“ I met him before this class on the hallway while he was on his way to the class. While we were talking, his friends came and dragged him along with them to a party. We are not allowed to sneak into parties in school hours right?”

“ Of course not, but you know, they have always been skipping classes for years now.”

“ According to what my brother said, He was not that sort of a person back in those days. He was the little blonde boy with piercing blue eyes who love his guitar more than his own life.”

“ What? He was that type of a guy? I never noticed any sign of him being aesthetic.”

“ Mm, I want to help him to get rid of his reputation as a bad boy.” I blurt out.

“ Not easy, What do you know about him other than him being called as the bad boy?”

“ Well, not anything special unless he is in the basketball team. Just that he was interested in playing guitar. Do you know anything else?”

“ Hm, I know that he’s speed racer not under a coach but for fun.”

“ Racer? What sort of a racer?”

“motorcycle racer.” Kate paused, “ You know that’s kind of dangerous right?”

“ Exactly, it is risky.” Our conversation was interrupted as the class started.

After French, I had music as my last period. I found myself always looking forward to that period. It’s such a stress relief and I also get to have some conversation with Lukas, I haven’t even seen him all day and Daniel was on my mind all day. As I entered the practice room, I heard a beautiful touch of a melody, I turned my head to find Lukas playing the piano from a corner of the room. He seemed to be lost in his own world of music.

“ Well playing.” I complimented, approaching him. I stopped, looking up at me.

“ Thank you!” He paused for a second breaking the eye contact, “ About yesterday-” he trailed off, clearly embarrassed.

“ That’s okay, we’ll forget about it! Will you continue your playing? I love the melody.”

There he continued making me hum along with it,

“ You two should perform together.” We were interrupted by a random statement and a clap. We turned around to see our music Teacher, Mrs. Anderson standing there with a smile laid upon her face.

“ Thank you”

“ I was serious, you two should perform in the upcoming Homecoming week.”

“ Have they planned on activities for the week?” Lukas questioned.

“ Yeah, it’s more or less same as usual, funny dress up day, a pep rally, A basketball game, football game and the dance. For the homecoming eve I want you all perform together. Is that alright for you two?”

We took several glances at each other as if we are having conversations through our expressions and finally nodded yes. That would be a huge moment for both of us to stand out in this school. After Mrs. Anderson left, we both remained there with so many emotions running through our minds.

“ Can you believe it? We’ll be performing a duet in front of the whole school!” I squealed in happiness, Lukas was seemed to be happy too.

"What song should we perform?" Lukas asked, refocusing on the task at hand.

"Maybe something upbeat that people can dance to; after all, it's Homecoming,"

"That sounds great, but we'll need lots of practice," I nodded in agreement.

After few minutes of just us selecting a suitable song, the bell rang. I picked up my bag and got ready to leave.

“ You coming? We could walk out together.”

“ Yeah, wait.” He picked all his stuff and then we both started walking out of the school, while we were passing the school’s outside basketball court, I saw Daniel dribbling the ball and throwing it perfectly into the hook from across the court, and all his team mates applause. He seemed to be very dedicated for his sport, at least that’s a plus point.

“ You didn’t told me that you are Derik’s sister” Lukas mentioned out of blue, making me regain my attention. Wait, How did he know?

“ I recognized him yesterday when he picked you up.” Ahh How can I be so silly. It didn’t even hit me that Lukas saw him yesterday.

“ Ahh yes,” I paused looking at him, “ Is it such a thing to mention specifically?”

As Lukas was about to tell something, he was cut off by Daniel approaching us.

“ Hey, Hanni!”

“ Where did you went today?”

“Today?!” There he acts, like he knows nothing.

“ Yes, exactly today. Where did you went before the social science class?”

“ Ahh- That- I had some work to do,” He trailed off,

“ Sure you had,” I said, walking straight without daring myself to look behind. I could hear Lukas’s footsteps behind me and soon he was beside me.

“ You know him?” He asked it with a very annoyed voice.

“ Not that much, He is just my brother’s friend.” I answered, not bothered by his tone.

“ Where did he go before the social science class?” Lukas asked, he has never acted so interested on getting to know something about a person. Why’s he so into the details?

“That’s what I don’t know, from what I heard, he was sneaking in to a party.”

“Party in school hours?”

“Yep, In school hours. I can’t believe they didn’t get caught for sneaking out.”

“Unbelievable.” His voice was filled with horror, “you should stay away from him,”

“Right, but we couldn’t judge him like that.”

“Like what?!”

“From whatever he is doing now, he might also be struggling with his life.”

“Perfectly imperfect.”

“What?” I hesitated.

“Everyone has their flaws.” I nodded, now we are already out of the school entrance,
“ Bye Hannah, see ya later!”

“Bye” and there we separated our ways. I slowly walked down the street to the usual spot where my brother parks the car.

“You are late!” He complained, looking up from his phone.

“Sorry, got in to a conversation while walking here,” I excused, sliding into the car.

"A conversation that couldn't wait until school tomorrow" Derik inquired, his tone laced with curiosity.

“Well, it’s Daniel.” I paused, adjusting my gaze on to Derik, who was seemed to be surprised. “He skips classes and sneaking into parties in school hours.”

“Parties, huh? Doesn’t seem to be like the Daniel I knew,” His eyes were focused on the road but I know that his mind wasn’t. He was too focused on the road which seems like he is lost in the thoughts.

"He's really into his game, though. I saw him on the court today."

“Was he good out there?”

"He made a pretty impressive shot," I replied without much enthusiasm.

"That's my boy!" Derik said with a proud smile, his focus returning to the road. But the smile didn't last long, and his thoughts seemed to wander. After that, he remained silent, and I could tell his mind was elsewhere. He usually played music on the radio, but today our ride was quiet. Derik appeared lost in thought, occasionally smiling as if reminiscing about their childhood, but those moments were fleeting, replaced by a look of melancholy.

After a ride which felt like thousand years finally came to an end as we entered through our gate. As I entered the house, I was greeted by the smell of mom making dinner.

I went straight up to my room, and got changed for the dinner. When I came down, everyone was already gathered around the table waiting for me as usual, I was always late when it comes to dinner.

“C’mon sis, I’m starving to death!” I laughed as I sat in my usual seat beside mom.

After praying for the food, we started eating and the family discussion starts.

“Mom, Dad, I need to tell you something.” Derik blurt out.

“Yeah?”

“I made my decision on playing basketball again, like a few days ago, and the coach tested me and told myself to take part in the upcoming match.”

“WHAT!?” Mom and Dad already choked their food. I saw this coming from the moment I heard there will be a basketball match for the homecoming week.

“No way, you are playing that again!” Mom said in a very stern voice, like it’s the end of the discussion.

“Mom, please, I’ve always wanted to play that. That’s what I love!”

“It doesn’t matter to me Derik; I care for your health not interests.”

“But Mom-”

“No buts, End of the discussion!”

“I DON’T CARE! I’M PLAYING THE MATCH! THAT’S IT!” He stood up.

“Where did you have guts to talk to your mother like that, young man, you better watch your words next time!” With that he stormed up the stairs and after few seconds, he slammed the bedroom door shut.

“What has gotten into him?” My mom asked in a very worried tone.

“Mom, He really loves his sport, maybe we should give him a second chance at it.”

“I don’t know, what do you think?” Mom turned to my dad who was busy on his phone. “Will you put that thing away in a family discussion!” Mom ranged.

“Honey, I have company works to be done. That’s why,” He made his daily excuse.

“Don’t you have enough time to do them at the company itself!?” With that mom also disappeared in to the kitchen, with her and Derik’s plates. After few seconds, Dad got up as he got a call and went in to his office room. While I was there, alone. I ate my dinner alone and went back to my room not bothering to knock on Derik’s door to check up on him. I really wanted to speak with him but not now, I don’t have any more energy to start up a conversation.

FIVE

The next day arrived with a sense of tension lingering in the air. I woke up to the sound of my mom's voice, seemingly engaged in a heated-up conversation. As I rubbed my sleepy eyes, still laying there on the bed, tired of going down to engage in another tiring conversation.

"Derik, are you sure about this? It was just like one year ago that you were severely injured," Mom's voice carried a note of concern and doubt.

"It was almost two years now Mom, I have to do this. I've got to be back on the court. It's where I belong."

As I lay in bed, I couldn't help but worry. After few minutes, I got up and made my way downstairs, I could sense a palpable tension that hung in the air, which stemmed from the earlier conversation. Mom was in the kitchen, her expression a mix of worry and concentration as she prepared breakfast. Dad was seated at the dining table, his usual morning energy dampened.

I took my seat, breaking the silence that enveloped the room. "Where's Derik?"

Mom met my gaze, and her eyes held a hint of exhaustion. "He left for school early. There's a morning basketball practice for the upcoming match. Dad will drop you to school today"

The unspoken feelings beneath her words were clear—she was worried about Derik's decision to return to the sport that had caused strife within the family.

At the school, While I was engaged in my math exercises, Kate came near me with a smile laying across her face.

“Girl!!! Congrats, I got to know that you and Lukas are going to perform on the homecoming week!” she hugged me from behind.

“Thank you!” I said in the same level of excitement. And there for some minutes we were chit chatting all the girly stuff. In the interval, me and my friends including Lukas was having lunch at the cafeteria. People were so loud that we could hardly hear each other after a while set of students came running in to the cafeteria and a boy jumped on to a table, gaining all the attention of the students;

"GUYS! COME TO THE BASKETBALL COURT, THE PRINCE OF THE COURT IS BACK, AND HE'S PLAYING HIS GAME ALONG WITH THE NEW MEMBER OF THE BASKETBALL TEAM, DERIK ALSHER. AND GUESS WHAT, THEY'RE COMPETING FOR THE CAPTAINCY!"

Everyone rushed out of the cafeteria, and Kate and Alex dragged both Lukas and me along.

"Who's the 'prince of the court'?" I asked, puzzled, while navigating through the bustling crowd toward the gym.

“Can’t you give it a guess,” Alex said.

“Is it Daniel they are mentioning?”

“Hell yeah!” What? They are fighting over each other for the captaincy? How can that be possible, Daniel is a well-practiced player and Derik, He- He stepped onto the court after like a year with no practice. As we went there, we were lucky enough to have some seats.

Derik's tall figure was easily recognizable on the court. He dribbled the ball and took practice shots with remarkable accuracy before the match began. But there was undeniable tension in the air, and I couldn't shake the knot in my stomach. Will he be all right? After a few minutes of students pouring into the gym, the match started.

The gym was buzzing with excitement as the match got underway. The atmosphere was electric, and the anticipation was palpable. Students and teachers had gathered to witness this unexpected showdown between Derik Alsher, the former star of the court, and Daniel, the reigning prince of basketball at our school.

Derik seemed focused and determined as he dribbled the ball, his movements smooth and calculated. He exuded confidence despite the long break from the game. On the other side, Daniel moved with a grace that only an experienced player could possess. His agility and precision were unmatched.

The tip-off was intense, and the ball soared into the air. It was a scramble for possession, but Daniel managed to secure it. The game had officially begun, and the crowd erupted into cheers.

The match unfolded with incredible speed and skill. Derik showcased his remarkable ball-handling skills and agility, surprising everyone with his ability to keep up with Daniel. Their one-on-one defense and offense were a sight to behold, with each player displaying exceptional prowess.

The crowd's emotions mirrored the intense competition on the court. Cheers and applause erupted every time a point was scored or a brilliant play executed. Both sides had their supporters, with Derik's fans hoping for his triumphant return and Daniel's loyal followers expecting nothing less than a victory.

The score remained close throughout the game. Derik and Daniel exchanged baskets, demonstrating their skills and determination. The battle for captaincy was far from one-sided, and the players' commitment was evident in every move they made.

As the clock ticked down, the tension in the gym reached its peak. The score was tied, and it was clear that this match was a true test of skill, willpower, and heart. It was more than just a game; it was a battle for recognition and leadership.

In the final minutes, the fate of the game hung in the balance. Both players were determined to lead their team to victory. Derik's determination to prove himself after a year away from the court and Daniel's commitment to maintaining his leadership clashed in an exhilarating showdown.

Throughout the game, I couldn't help but notice Daniel stealing glances at me whenever he could. His piercing eyes would briefly meet mine, and then he'd return his focus to the game. It was a strange feeling, knowing that the game was so important to both of them, yet Daniel's attention seemed divided. With only seconds left, Derik made an incredible steal and drove toward the basket. The entire gym held its breath as he went for the game-winning shot. In a heart-stopping moment, the ball left his fingertips and sailed through the air.

The buzzer sounded just as the ball swished through the net. Derik's shot had won the game for his team, securing his place as the new captain of the basketball team. The gym exploded with cheers and applause, and I couldn't help but feel a surge of pride for my brother. He had defied the odds, returning to the court and proving that he was still a force to be reckoned with.

But what caught my attention next was Daniel's reaction. He clapped his hands, his face breaking into a smile. It was a genuine display of sportsmanship, and I couldn't help but admire the grace with which he accepted defeat. It was clear that the game had meant a lot to him, but he showed nothing but respect for Derik's victory. As the gym emptied, I made my way to where Derik and Daniel were standing. They shared a warm handshake and a few words. I could see that their friendship was intact, despite the rivalry on the court.

After the match, girls were mingling through the crowd to get signatures of Derik and Daniel. The celebrations took a lot of time that after all that only one period was left, and it was the social science class that I thought of taking this year. At the middle of the class when I was fully concentrated on to the lesson, a guy came through the door, excusing which happened to be none other than Daniel Jhonson. He walked up to me and sat beside me on the table with a smile playing on his lips.

“Hey,”

“Hey, great playing today but not better than my brother’s” I told him just as a joke.

“Yeah, he performed more than I expected him to play.”

“You certainly did a good job but later on, your concentration wasn’t totally on the game, was it?”

“True, it’s hard to play my damn game when there’s a beautiful girl on stands, watching.”

“Oh c’mon, stop talking nonsense and will you let me focus on the lesson?”

“Yeah, sure, it’s not like I told you to have a conversation with me.” I shrugged it off and focused on the lesson. After that class, Kate and I walked down the hallway with having Daniel follow us from behind.

“Why’s he following us?” Kate questioned, stealing glances at him, turning her neck.

“Probably not following, maybe he is on his way to the locker just like us.”

After few minutes bell rang, and the hallway was crowded with hundreds of students making their way out of the school. I also mingled through them and got outside. Lukas and I thought of staying afterschool for practices so, I massaged Derik that I'll be staying until 6pm and he instantly replied that he will be staying too, for his first team meeting as the captain of the team. He seemed to be in a good health after the tough game, which make myself feel stress free with the hope of him being alright with playing basketball again. I made my way towards the music room waving Kate and Alex goodbye to see Lukas already there, playing the piano.

In the midst of the game, Lukas got up and went outside of the gym, I was too focused to inquire the reasons about it, maybe he isn’t a fan of sports. I cleared my throat while entering the music room, gaining his attention.

“How was the game?” He asked in a very calm and smoothing voice.

“Turned out that my brother’s the captain now,”

“Ah really? That’s a good news. What about Daniel?”

“He seems to remain cool, he’s the vice-captain I guess.”

“Hmm, He lost his concentration that’s what happened to him.” Lukas said, not even looking at me, focused on the piano keys. Lukas's fingers danced across the piano keys, filling the room with a soothing melody. As the music enveloped me, I couldn't help but feel a sense of peace. It was a stark contrast to the excitement of the basketball game I had witnessed earlier.

Lukas eventually concluded his piece and turned to me, his sharp hazel brown eyes locking onto mine. "It must be a big day for your family with Derik becoming the captain," he said, breaking the silence.

I nodded, a sense of pride swelling within me. Mom and Dad would be pleased and will definitely let him play upcoming matches when they'll hear the news, even though if they would disagree, I'm sure Derik's not going to give up.

"Yes, it is. Derik worked really hard for this opportunity,"

Lukas offered a warm smile. "I could see the happiness in your eyes during the game. It's clear how much you care about your brother."

I couldn't help but blush at his observation. "Well, we've always been close, and I've seen the dedication and passion he has for basketball."

Lukas's gaze remained fixed on me, and for a moment, I felt like he was trying to convey something more. "Hannah, sometimes the people closest to us have hidden strengths and depths we may not realize. We should talk things out to get to know one another."

His words struck a chord with me, and I couldn't help but wonder if Lukas was hinting at something deeper. Before I could dwell on it further, Lukas changed the subject.

"So, about our performance at the homecoming week, any ideas for the song we should choose?"

I welcomed the shift in conversation, eager to discuss our upcoming musical collaboration. We spent the next hour brainstorming song ideas, listening to different tracks, and harmonizing on various melodies. It was a delightful distraction from the intensity of the basketball game and the unspoken emotions between us.

As the evening sun painted the sky with shades of orange and pink, we wrapped up our practice. Lukas walked me to the school entrance where Derik was waiting to drive me home, it was quite of a silent walk, we were both gazing up at the beautiful sky, after a while of walking in silence, we are at the gate. I waved Lukas goodbye approaching towards my brother.

"Hey, sis!" Derik greeted me with a grin as I approached him.

"Hey, Derik. My heartfelt congratulations on becoming the captain!" I beamed at him, and he ruffled my hair affectionately.

"Thanks, Hannah. It means a lot to me," he said, his pride evident.

As Derik navigated the familiar streets on our way home, I couldn't help but replay the events of the day in my mind. The basketball game, Lukas's music, and the unspoken emotions that seemed to be simmering beneath the surface. My thoughts wandered and a subtle smile tugged at the corners of my lips.

"You seem awfully happy today," Derik noted, glancing at me while keeping his focus on the road.

I felt my cheeks warm, but I didn't deny it. "Yeah, it's been quite a day. Seeing you as the captain, the basketball game, and, well..." I trailed off, not quite sure how to put my feelings into words.

Derik raised an eyebrow, his curiosity piqued. "Well, what?"

I hesitated for a moment before admitting, "The prince of the court, he handled the game so gracefully, and he even congratulated you with such a genuine smile across his face when you won."

Derik chuckled. "Ah, that's what you were thinking, huh?"

I nodded, feeling a bit self-conscious. "Yeah, I mean, he's a great player, and he was so... cool about it all."

Derik's grin widened. "Well, it's nice to see my little sister so interested in the topic of sportsmanship. But remember, it's just a basketball game. You have plenty of time to get to know him better. Let the time do its thing."

"Yeah, right." I nodded, looking outside of the window, and leaned against it, my eyes laid on the passing scenery of the beach where a lot of kids were seemed to be such a happy mood, running around everywhere which kind of made myself remind me of the days back in my hometown, it was a memory to be cherished.

"But you know, I think he might've had another reason to stay cool about it all." I snapped out of my thoughts as I heard Derik's voice.

I turned to my brother, intrigued. "What do you mean?"

"Well," Derik began, "you know how they say there are two ways for a good sportsman to win in the life? One is on the court, but the other is off the court. And that little man, won over both at the same time."

It took me sometime to realize what he meant, and when the realization hit me, I poked him on the shoulder with a smile tugged on the edge of my lips.

"You want to die? Don't you dare touch a driver," He shrugged my hand off, while laughing.

I couldn't resist a teasing grin. "Come on, big brother, you were driving just fine, and I was only giving you a friendly nudge."

Derik chuckled, shaking his head. "Friendly nudge, huh? Well, be careful with those nudges, or I might decide to drop you off in the middle of nowhere next time."

"Understood, Captain!" I saluted, laughing.

"Hey, so talking about interests, I could do a help for you."

"Help? No thanks." I said sarcastically,

"I still didn't even tell you; you know, I could invite Daniel over for dinner tomorrow."

"Good, how can that be a help to me?" I asked not showing off my excitement.

"Well, that's a thing you should be aware of yourself."

The sun had dipped below the horizon as we pulled into our driveway. The house was bathed in a soft, warm light, and the familiar surroundings felt like a comforting embrace. We entered the house, and the aroma of dinner being prepared by our mother enveloped us. I headed to the kitchen, following the delicious scent, and Derik came alongside.

“Hey mom,” I smiled, wrapping my arms around her waist, resting my chin on her shoulder, placing a kiss on the cheek.

“Hey, sweetie. How was your day?”

“Do you know what happened today?” I stated, excitedly to spill about the basketball match, “Derik and Daniel competed for the captaincy today and guess what, Derik won over the experienced, talented player Daniel and got the captaincy!” Mom’s face lit up in a bright smile as she hugged, Derik tightly congratulating him. It was such a cute scenario, mom seemed like she’s hugging her dad as Derik was way taller. But soon her bright face was washed over by concern.

“Are you all right with your leg, dear? Is it hurting?” she whispered, a mother's concern evident as she examined his leg.

Derik reassured her, "It's fine, Mom, no pain." He leaped around to emphasize his good health, and Mom's eyes welled up with tears, though they were tears of happiness.

“Aww, mom, don’t cry!” Derik cooed, pulling her into his arms.

“I’m so happy for you, darling!” She cried, looking up at Derik. After few second of them hugging each other, mom pulled away, “Wait, I’ll call your dad, He’d be so proud! I wish he was here today,”

“Why mom? Isn’t he coming home today?”

“No, he said that he’ll be having an urgent meeting to attend, he would probably be returning tomorrow.” That’s my father, he used to spend more time with us but now with his promotion, he always seemed to be welled up in business.

“Derik, he would definitely take a call to you, congratulating. Don’t worry about it! You two go and take a wash.” Mom said totally faking a smile.

After I took a fresh, relaxing shower, I went down the stairs to see, Derik on the counter with his laptop while mom was still preparing dinner. I took a seat beside him to see that he’s in a video call with Kylie. It has been so long seeing her, though we chatted time to time, I really miss seeing her. When I was free to call her, she was always on her way to college so, it’s difficult for her to turn on the video.

“Hey!” I squealed, as I waved at the camera.

“Hey sweetie!!!” She looked so different; she has cut her hair short.

"Dude, you cut your hair?" I exclaimed, pushing Derik aside and leaning closer to the camera.

Kylie laughed. "Yeah, do you like it?"

"I love it!" I assured her.

“Thank you, so Derik was talking about his match today,” She paused, wanting me to continue.

“Ah- Yes, oh my god, you should have seen the match, Derik took the last point so smoothly!”

“That’s my brother! And Derik told me about Daniel, he’s such a light hearted boy, I hope he’s feeling okay!”

“Of course, he seemed to be cool with it. Wait, you know him?”

“Yeah, of course I know, back in those days, he was always in our house playing with you all. Can’t you remember playing with him?”

“No” I answered, trying my best to recall something.

“Maybe, you were so small.”

“Ky, you know what, Hannah seemed to interested in Daniels sportsmanship”

“His *sportsmanship*?!”

“ Yeah, that’s what she said,” Derik teased, with a smirk.

My eyes widened in shock, “Stop embarrassing me, I admire his talent, that’s it!”

Derik grinned mischievously. "Oh, of course, you were just admiring his 'sportsmanship.' Well, you should invite him over for dinner sometime to discuss sportsmanship in more detail."

I rolled my eyes, unable to hide my laughter. "Sure, big brother, I'll get right on that."

Our mom, who had been listening to their playful banter, chimed in, "Well, if Daniel ever comes over, I'll make sure to cook his favorite meal. We wouldn't want to disappoint our star basketball player, would we? And don't forget to invite Emma over as well. It's been so long, and we haven't really catch up on our lives."

"You told me that they came to visit us the other day, how was the younger sister? She might be a grown up and all." Kylie asked, leaving Derik and Mom's faces devastated. This is something I totally forgot about, what has happened to his father and sister?

"They are divorced and Daniel and his sister were separated. I feel sorry for him." Derik answered, how could I not be aware of this? This might be the reason for his changes in behavior.

"Oh, That's sad. I hope Mrs. Jhonson is doing alright,"

Mom added, "They are facing financial issues these days. Mr. Johnson owned their previous house, and they had to move into a more modest place. This must have been challenging for Daniel, who had spent half his life in a mansion with all the comforts."

This is exactly the reason for him to change. It must have been an awful experience for sure.

After the video call, I was deep in thought about everything that Daniel had to witness. In one side, I see Daniel struggling with because they are not financially stable and on the other, I witnessed Lukas struggling because he has a lot of money and fame. These always make me think that no one is made perfect, everyone has their own problems in life.

Later that evening, I heard Derik on the phone with Daniel. Just like he said earlier, he invited Daniel over along with his mother. I even heard them planning to play basketball in the evening and watch a movie later. The plan sounds exciting.

"Hannah, maybe you can invite your friends over as well. We can have some fun."

"Yeah, that would be incredible!" Mom joined in.

“Thank you, I’ll see if others are free tomorrow,” I replied, pulling out my phone, making calls. Everyone agreed including Lukas. With the fact that tomorrow would be so fun, I couldn’t even let myself fall asleep, I was just too excited.

Next morning, after we took breakfast, everyone arrived.

After a while of just sitting there on the couch, Derik suggested on playing basketball. We split in to two teams. Of course, Derik and Daniel were the captains. They picked each of us to their groups. Derik picked Lukas on to his team, and then Daniel picked Alex, and there were me and Kate left to be chosen. It was my brother’s turn to take his decision, He chooses Kate which seemed to be his plan.

"Alright, Daniel, you got Hannah," Derik announced with a grin, and Daniel responded with a sly wink, sending a wave of playfulness through the group.

With teams set, we headed to the basketball court behind the house. It was a sunny day with a slight breeze, perfect for an outdoor game. I was a bit nervous about playing with Daniel on the same team. I dribbled the basketball a few times, trying to shake off the jitters.

Daniel, ever the charismatic athlete, flashed me a reassuring smile. "Hey, don't worry. We've got this," he said, his voice brimming with confidence.

I nodded, finding his confidence infectious. "Yeah, let's show them what we've got."

The game began, and it was an intense match. The laughter, banter, and trash talk between the teams filled the air. Derik and Danial, the experienced players, led their respective teams. Kate was quick on her feet, making her way through the court with grace, while Alex showcased surprising agility. Lukas performed well than I expected him to. I thought he never liked sports but guess I'm wrong.

In the midst of the game, Alex passed me the ball, and I dribbled down the court, my heart pounding with a mix of excitement and competitiveness. Derik was guarding me closely, and I could see the determination in his eyes. It was difficult not to get lost in his deep brown eyes, but I couldn't afford to lose focus.

"Come on, Hannah, show us what you've got!" Lukas shouted from the other side, adding to the friendly rivalry.

As I made my way toward the basket, the defenders closed in. I attempted to maneuver past Derik, but a sudden swerve sent me sprawling onto the court. The impact stung, and I winced as I fell to the ground.

"Hannah!" Daniel called out; concern etched on his face. He rushed over and knelt beside me, while the others stopped playing to check on us.

"You, okay?" he asked, his hands gently examining my knee.

I nodded, trying to hide the fact that it hurt more than I let on. "I'm good, just a little fall, I guess."

Daniel produced a small medical kit he must've had in his bag and retrieved a small ice pack. He looked into my eyes and said, "This might help reduce the swelling. Hold it here." The warmth of his hand made me forget about the pain as he pressed the ice pack against my knee.

It was a brief but intimate moment, with our faces just inches apart, and I couldn't help but notice the concern etched in his features. For a split second, the world around us disappeared, and it felt like we were the only two people on that court.

"Thanks," I managed to say, breaking the silence. "You didn't have to stop the game."

He chuckled, a hint of embarrassment in his voice. "It's just a game, and I didn't want anyone to get hurt."

Our brief exchange didn't go unnoticed by the others, particularly Kate, who exchanged a knowing look with Alex. The unspoken chemistry between Daniel and me was becoming evident.

Once I was back on my feet, we resumed the game, the intensity on the court continued, but there was a new energy among us. The game was fierce, and each point was hard-fought, but it was also a source of fun and bonding.

Throughout the game, I couldn't help but steal glances at Daniel, and he returned the favor. Our secret glances and subtle smiles added an unspoken layer of excitement to the game.

After an intense match, which seemed to stretch on endlessly, we finally decided to call it a draw. We were all sweaty and exhausted, but the laughter and camaraderie we shared made it all worthwhile.

Derik declared, "That was an epic game, everyone. Now, let's cool off and decide on the movie we're going to watch."

As we sat on the porch, catching our breath and discussing our movie options, I found myself next to Daniel. The excitement of the game still lingered between us.

"You played really well today," he said with a sincere smile, brushing a strand of hair away from my face.

"Thanks," I replied, trying to act cool.

The evening continued with animated discussions and jokes. We settled on a movie, and I couldn't help but notice Daniel's attempts to make me laugh with his witty remarks and playful teasing. Our conversations were filled with laughter and those secret smiles, all while Derik and Kate seemed to conspire and keep a close watch on us.

At dinner, the table was filled with delicious dishes, laughter, and stories. Mrs. Johnson shared her own stories and expressed her gratitude for inviting them. It was heartwarming to see the smile on her face, and I admired her strength despite the hardships she had endured.

As the night progressed, and the movie came to an end, we said our goodbyes, I wish the night lasted longer than this. But anyway, it was such a nice experience for all of us.

Soon after, the homecoming week had arrived, and our school was filled with excitement and vibrant energy. What was more exciting was that Daniel and Derik were nominated as the hoco kings along with eight other juniors and seniors, one of them would be crowned on the homecoming eve.

Each day brought something new and thrilling, from '90s-themed dress-up days to a massive pep rally that had the whole school roaring with enthusiasm. Cheering for both the football and basketball teams, we felt like a united force of spirit and support.

On the game's day, morning we had the football match which was a total win and later in the evening, the focus shifted to the basketball court. As the game commenced, the atmosphere was thick with tension. The opposing team was no pushover, and every basket was hard-fought. I clutched the edge of my seat, my heart pounding in my chest. Every pass, dribble, and shot were executed with precision and determination.

On the court, Daniel's eyes seemed to find me, even in the midst of the intense match. It was like our secret connection from the previous game had carried over.

The opposing team gave it their all, displaying incredible teamwork and skill. But as the game reached its climax, it was clear that our team, under the leadership of Derik and with Daniel's exceptional performance, was inching ahead. The crowd was on its feet, cheering with unbridled enthusiasm.

The clock was ticking down, and the score was neck and neck. The pressure in the gym was palpable. With seconds to go, we were down by one point, and the ball was in Daniel's hands. He dribbled past his defender, his focus unbreakable. In one swift, calculated motion, he launched the ball towards the hoop.

Time seemed to slow as the basketball soared through the air. The gym fell into an eerie silence before erupting into a deafening roar as the ball swished through the net. We had won! The sheer exhilaration of the moment was overwhelming.

Daniel, at the center of it all, glanced towards me with a triumphant smile. The look in his eyes was a mix of pride and something else which I couldn't express correctly. The celebrations were wild and unending. The victory was not only a win on the court but a testament to the hard work, spirit, and camaraderie that bound our team together. As we left the gym, we were greeted by cheers, high-fives, and hugs from fellow students and fans.

The day of the homecoming eve had arrived, and excitement hung in the air like a charged current. The sun dipped below the horizon, casting a warm orange glow across the evening sky. Kate and Alex had come over to my place to get ready for the night's festivities, and my mom was eager to help them prepare.

Kate, with her vibrant personality and stunning looks, was wearing a flowing blue dress that brought out the color of her eyes. Alex, sporting an air of sophistication,

had chosen a classic black pencil dress. My mom, with her friendly demeanor, took charge of their hair and makeup, turning them into radiant stars for the evening.

“You are natural beauty, dear” my mom complemented Kate as she did her final makeup touch ups, she smiled looking up at her. “Thank you so much Mrs. Alsher, You are such an expert in make up!” Kate exclaimed looking at her reflection.

“Exactly,” Alex who was already done with her makeup joined in.

“Thanks girls!” Mom turned to my side, and started doing my makeup, my dress was a deep, royal blue, with delicate lacework and a flowing skirt, it fits perfectly on me.

“Looking at all of you I remember myself getting ready for hoco back in those good old days! Hannah, you look absolutely stunning dear,” she said, placing a soft kiss on my cheek as she’s done with my makeup.

“You better not be sweating down the beautiful makeup by dancing tonight!” Kate teased, resting her hand on my shoulder, getting closer.

“Like you won’t,” There we all laughed making all the silly jokes.

While we were busy in the living room, Lukas, who had come a bit early to do a rehearsal of the tonight’s performance, sat on the couch with Alex, Lukas look dashing in his suit. His focus, however, shifted when he saw me approach.

“Hannah, you look stunning,” Lukas complimented with genuine admiration in his eyes. “The boy who would have guts to ask you to be his dance partner would be pretty lucky,”

My cheeks reddened as I accepted the compliment. "Thank you, Lukas. You look pretty dapper yourself."

“Thanks!” Lukas said, and turned towards Kate who was busy checking herself out from the mirror, Lukas cleared his throat gaining her attention. “Would you like to be my partner for the homecoming tonight?”

“You are pretty lucky today young man as my answer will be a big fat yes!” She smiled, and every one of us cheered for them.

After few minutes of chit chatting with each other, we did the last rehearsal of the tonight’s performance which went really well. Few moments later, Derik and his date, a senior cheerleader named Jessica joined the bustling scene. Derik had a

striking presence in his tuxedo, and it was clear why he was nominated as the Hoco king. Both of them actually made quite of good-looking couple.

“Look who’s coming!” My mom went towards the door, welcoming both of them with her tight hugs. “You look just like your father back in 90’s,” she said, kissing him on the cheek, hugging him.

“Not better than me right, darling?” My dad chimed in, with a camera on his hands.

“Of course not, honey, no one’s looking better than you.” Oh, my parents, they never grow old, that is one thing I always admired in them.

“You look gorgeous dear!” Mom complimented Jessica throwing a hand around her waist, “Thank you so much!”

“Oh my god, ladies, you all look so pretty!” Derik shouted as he entered the living room, making my friends blush. He gave each one a friendly hug and paused, looking at me.

“Look at you chubs,” Derik said, approaching towards me.

“I’m not chubby!” I protested as usual,

“Yeah, yeah, I know,” He paused, looking straight into my eyes. “You look striking!” He complemented, placing a soft kiss on my forehead, wrapping his arms securely around my waist, “Haven’t I always told you have your 'brother's sister' charm. It's a real thing, you know" he said, earning a playful punch on his chest. Everyone laughed, and it was such a special moment to hold forever.

My mom and dad were ecstatic to see all of us together, their warm hospitality radiating as they offered everyone snacks and drinks and took pictures of us in every angle possible.

After like hundreds of pictures, finally it was time to leave for the homecoming, and we were about to head out when there was an unexpected knock on the door. I opened it to find Daniel standing there in a sleek black tuxedo holding a bouquet of beautiful flowers in his hand which exactly matched my dress color.

“Hey, Hannah,” he greeted me with a warm smile. “I hope I'm not too late. I couldn't help but bring these for you and I had to find a store which has flowers which match your dress.”

My heart skipped a beat as I took the flowers. "Thank you!" my voice was hardly audible. "But how did you know my dress color?"

"Well, I had the help of your besties, thanks Kate and Alex for the information." The nodded their heads with accept. I looked back at them surprisingly,

"So, Hannah Alsher," Daniel continued, "will you do me the honor of being my dance partner tonight?"

A delighted squeal escaped my lips, and everyone cheered in the background. As we all gathered in the living room, mixed emotions swirled within me. My parents took the opportunity to capture more pictures, making the moment a bit bittersweet. This wasn't what I had anticipated, but it was a testament to the unpredictable nature of life.

Before leaving, Derik approached me, his eyes reflecting a myriad of emotions. He placed a tender kiss on my forehead again and said,

"You look absolutely stunning, sis. Have a great night." Then he turned to Daniel, adding, "Young man, you better look after my little sister, or you know what I'll do."

Daniel responded with a smile tugging at the corners of his lips, reminiscent of the smile he had given me during the basketball match when they were competing for the captaincy. "Yeah, bro, you can count on it."

Finally, we arrived at the venue, and the dance floor was already alive with music and swirling dresses. The decorations were breathtaking, it was decorated by thousands of rose petals. After a while, Mrs. Anderson stepped near us where we were taking pictures.

"Hannah, Lukas, next is your turn. Are you ready with the performance?"

"Yeah," We both nodded, feeling excited and nervous at the same time.

After few minutes, Lukas and I took the stage, our eyes locked, and our hearts in sync. The music began, and the first notes of the piano filled the room. We sang our hearts out, and the crowd was entranced by the harmony of our voices. They seemed to be enjoying the music, then the smoothing music turned in to the upbeat and everyone started singing along with us, dancing.

Our performance stole the hearts of everyone in the room, as we poured our emotions into the lyrics. The applause that followed was deafening, and we shared a triumphant smile, knowing we had left an indelible mark.

After the performance, we joined our friends, who showered us with praises. It was a surreal moment, and I couldn't have been happier.

As the night progressed, it was time to announce the homecoming king and queen. The tension in the room was palpable. The excitement mounted as the moment we had all been waiting for arrived.

"Your homecoming king and queen are..." the announcer's voice echoed through the room, and I held my breath, "The senior heart throb Derik Alsher and his lovely date tonight, Jessica Baker!"

Derik and Jessica looked stunning as they made their way to the center of the dance floor. The applause and cheers for them were enthusiastic and were crowned at the king and queen of this amazing night. I was so proud of him, he looked at me from above and smiled. Such a charmer he is.

I turned to Daniel, who appeared a bit disheartened, and I gave him an encouraging smile. "You might not have won the crown tonight," I said softly, "but you've already won something even more special." He looked at me quizzically, and I continued, "You've got a reserved spot in my heart, and that's a prize no title can match." Daniel's face lit up with a grin, and the disappointment seemed to melt away.

The evening reached its peak when, during a slow dance, Daniel looked into my eyes and asked, "Hannah, will you be my dance partner for the rest of the night and maybe, just maybe, for many more dances to come?" I nodded, feeling flattered.

I stayed silent for a moment, savoring the peaceful night. Then, with a touch of wistfulness in my voice, I said, "I wish moments like these could last forever." Daniel nodded in agreement, and together, under the shimmering stars, and just like that, we bid farewell to the current school term. It's been almost 15 years since that wonderful night with your dad, I'm lucky to be sharing this you guys.

“Mommy, what happened after that night? Did you not see our dad for the entire vacation?” Kelly, my youngest daughter asked,

“I’d tell all that on another day, okay? Now it’s time to sleep.”

“Please mommy,” Emily, my eldest daughter and Kelly kept asking for more.

As I looked at Kelly, her eyes filled with curiosity, I smiled and continued the story for my children.

"Well, sweetheart, the vacation in Bali was filled with adventure and joy. Your dad, you see, he had to leave for his own family vacation. So, for a little while, we were apart, but we stayed in touch. We sent messages, shared pictures, and talked about all the fun we were having, almost like we were together, even though we were miles apart."

"Did you miss him, Mommy?" asked Emily, my older daughter.

"Oh, I missed him a lot," I admitted. "But it was also a time for both of us to enjoy our vacations and make special memories with our families. And, well, absence can make the heart grow fonder, they say"

Just as I finished, the door to the girls' room creaked open, and in walked their dad, Daniel. "Did I interrupt your little bedtime story?" he asked with a warm smile, leaning against the doorframe.

"Mommy was telling us a story about how she moved to a new city, how she met friends and even you," Emily explained, her eyes shining with excitement.

"Ah, did she tell you about her sophomore year homecoming dance," Daniel asked with a reminiscent grin. Both of them started nodding their head vigorously. "Those were the days, weren't they?" He said, looking at me with a grin.

“Mommy, what happened to uncle Lukas?” Kelly asked.

“Well, we of course stayed in touch, he was always there for me. And about his family issues, they were seemed to be alright, his father understood him”

After high school, he released a song album on his own, and now, he is one of the most famous artists in the world while, I’m pursuing my dream as a surgeon. It was such a dream that I never thought of in my semaphore year. It all just happened. Daniel make his first ever appearance on a TV advertisement in the first year of

college, and since then, he got his job as a professional actor. Talking of my dearest friends, Alex and Kate, they also make their own way of success.

“Hannah,” Daniel called out, making me snap out of my thoughts, “Lukas has sent me a message that he and Sarah will be visiting us on this summer vacation.” You read it right, He’s married to one of the girls he met in the college. “He has also mentioned that he will be bringing you all lots of gifts.”

“We love Uncle Lukas!!!” My girls were screaming their throats out, jumping on the bed. Every time Lukas visits us, he brings loads of gifts for them.

“Not more than me, right!?” Daniel chimed in, pulling Kelly into his arms.

“Of course not, daddy,” she giggled, looking up at him.

Daniel grinned and added, "You know you're always my favorite!" He patted her head and exchanged a playful wink with her. I couldn't help but join in the fun. With a faux stern expression, I looked at Daniel and said,

“Oh, really? I thought I was your one and only favorite.”

Emily, my eldest daughter, quickly chimed in, "What about me, Daddy? Once you said that I’m your favorite when I helped you with the bags!"

“Such a trickster!” we all shouted, throwing pillows at him.

The room filled with laughter as Daniel, playing along, spread his arms wide and declared, "Well, I guess I have three favorites then!" What a lovely family I have.

Emily chimed in, "Back to the story, Mommy. You said that you were miles apart during the vacation. What happened next?"

Daniel made them settle down on their beds. "Well," he began, "after the vacation, your mom and I started spending more time together. We realized how much we missed each other during those weeks apart. Eventually, when your mom was in her first year of college, we became a serious couple and started dating."

"And we've been together ever since," I added, reaching over to hold Daniel's hand.

"Wow, you guys are like a real-life fairytale," Emily said, snuggling under her covers.

"Indeed, we are," I whispered, looking at our children and then at Daniel, our hearts full of love and gratitude.

"And just like in the best fairytales," Daniel concluded, "we found our 'happily ever after' right here, with the love of our lives."

As Daniel gazed into my eyes under the soft glow of the moonlight, he whispered, "We might not be exactly a fairytale, my love, but you and me, we are the definition of *perfectly imperfect*."

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Afterword



As modern technology permeates the social and economic arenas, students tend to distance themselves from the creative process, relying more and more on technological tools. To reduce this risk and help aspiring young writers produce their own books, I sought and presented a research proposal to the Ministry of Education in 2014. It was a fantastic

opportunity for children to showcase their enthusiasm and knowledge. The students of Mahamaya Girls' College achieved a record for the most books written, paving the way for a new level of innovation. The e-book project will enable the students to reach international readers, and I am confident that they have gained new experiences and challenges that will enable them to face the future with resolve. I wish all of the young writers the best of luck in their future endeavors

Senevirathna Mahalekm

Founder of Books Publishing Project Among School Children

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