

The next morning, she went off to school without saying goodbye to her father. He saw her walking out the door, but remained silent. He simply couldn't be bothered to care.

As Finnley hopped on her bike, she saw a figure running down the street. Short, lanky, blue eyed. Kiran. Finnley was surprised, since Kiran usually would walk with his sister to school. This time, though, Kiran was running alongside his old pink bike (which he insisted was actually beige). "Hey, wait up!" He called out to her, grinning that crooked smile of his. To that, Finnley chuckled, slowing her steps so he could catch up, "Where's Kyra?" When he finally caught up to her, a little out of breath, he raised a hand to signal for her to stop

walking, “Kyra? Oh, she's walking with her fudging friends today— can you believe it? Them over me?” He put a hand to his head, swooning dramatically. Finnley laughed, “Okay, well, that wasn't very nice of her. But, seriously? ‘Fudging’? Weren't you supposed to be bad-boy and all that?” His face went beat red and he gave a crooked smile, “W-well, you see, I can be big and strong and cool without having to curse! I am a gentleman, after all. Gentlemen don't curse.”

“Yeah, right. You have the manners of a toddler— can't even hold a door open.” She scoffed, but there was no malice to her words.

As they walked, they continued to banter, enjoying each other's company. As they

neared the school, which basically looked like a larger version of every other building in the town, they saw a group of teachers crowding the entrance, probably chatting instead of doing their job. As they walked closer, they could hear their whispering, something about which students they expected to fail, which were already failing, and, of course, both of them were on the expected list. They weren't necessarily known for their intelligence. Kiran struggled with most things literature and Finnley couldn't stand math for the life of her. Plus, on Kiran's behalf, it wasn't exactly the smartest idea to befriend the town's resident weirdo.

Finnley never quite understood why Kiran would be friends with her, he had the

opportunity to be one of the popular ones, to have more than just one friend, to actually have a life. He could've been so much more, but instead, he chose the life of a weirdo, a freak, and not in the cute "I'm such a freak" way (meaning they just so happen to have an odd hobby and they aren't actually weird or a freak at all). For some ungodly reason, he chose to be the kid who people expected to become the next naked homeless man on the street corner, the one who was shunned out by his family. He chose her rotten version of this town, when he could've had it all. It didn't matter though, no matter how much Finnley wouldn't have made the same choice, he did, and she'd never not be grateful.

Finnley was snapped out of her thoughts as they walked past a group of girls, one of them whispered to the other, “Look at them..” the other whispered back, “pigs...” Finnley shot glares at them and they all giggled. Bethany was one of them, and Finnley couldn't help but hate her. She was the reason all of this happened. Her and her stupid perfect friends, and her perfect grades, and her perfect smile, and that gorgeous laugh of hers, and— never-mind. You should get it by now, Bethany was perfect and Finnley wasn't. Point proven. Kyra walked with Bethany, and she looked at them with a guilty look. Another friend of Bethany's, Diana, stared at them with slight pity. Diana was a chubby girl, with shoulder length brown hair, brown eyes, and a picture

perfect smile. She had her charm to her, and if it weren't for her being friends with Bethany, Finnley might've tried to talk to her.

Going their separate ways, the two groups went to their respective lockers. Lucky for Finnley, her locker was right next to Kiran's. Putting their stuff away, Finnley thought back to her arguments with her father. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, shaking her head slowly. Kiran noticed, "What's wrong?" He questioned, lightly elbowing her. "Nothin'. Just... thinking." She lied through gritted teeth, the lie was obvious, she didn't even try to cover it up, and for a moment, she felt like her father. A younger her would've taken that as a compliment, but as it is now, it felt more like a punishment. *Like my father... like him of*

*all people, and towards my best friend?*

*Jerk.* Maybe it was teenage hormones, but she found dread washing over her at the thought of turning out like him. A sad alcoholic with a dead wife. Sounds like a great life, doesn't it? Kiran's eyes softened and he slowly turned to her, "I know it's not nothing." Something in Finnley snapped just then, and she slammed her locker, getting her weird looks from the nearby students, "I know you know it's not nothing! You're supposed to just let me sulk in self pity like a normal person!" She grasped his shoulders, shaking him a bit, angry tears welling up in her eyes. "But I won't." He started, swatting her hands away calmly, "I won't just let you sulk in self pity because I care. I care about you." He gave her a weak

smile, but she stayed angry, “Stop lying, you damn bastard! You know you don't actually care! You're just here to pity me, aren't you?! Because— because you're just like the rest of them!” She snapped, “And don't you dare give me that stupid ugly smile! I hate it!”

A flash of hurt crossed his eyes, but he quickly pushed it away, reaching for her clenched fist, “Hey... C'mon, I know you don't mean that. You know I care about you, right? Not everybody is out to get you, Finnley. If I was ever here to just pity you, I would've left the first time you slapped me back in fourth grade, remember?” A wave of guilt crashed over her, but she couldn't back out now, could she? It was too late to apologize, or at least she thought so, so

instead she just huffed, “You should’ve left. Let’s be real, the only reason you didn’t is because you already knew everyone else already thought you’re weird or whatever.”

Kiran was honestly starting to get frustrated. Why was she so adamant about him hating her or something? She was usually always angry at something, but this was worse than usual. He stubbornly crossed his arms and mumbled, “Maybe I should’ve, but I didn’t, okay? Why is that so hard for you to understand?”

“So hard for me to understand? Maybe because no sane person would!” She retorted.

“Okay, w-well, maybe I’m just as messed up as you!”

“So now you wanna act like you’ve secretly been messed up all along?! Please, spare me the bull— you and I both know that you are nowhere near as messed up as me because all you are is a spoiled brat who gets everything handed to him and happens to think it’s cool to have a weird friend!”

At this point, Kiran was starting to tear up. He hated crying, his father said it made him pathetic. He hated when people dismissed his problems, of course, he knew there were people who had it much, much worse, but was he really so insignificant? He knew he was a bit... sheltered, to say the least, but was he really spoiled? He didn’t realize as the first of his tears began to fall until he suddenly felt Finnley’s arms wrapped around him. He was snapped back to

reality, a reality where Finnley was also crying, whispering softly, “No, no, no, don’t cry... please, don’t cry... I didn’t mean to... I- I swear...”

He quietly wrapped his arms around her, sighing. He knew she was stressed, she didn’t have to tell him anything for him to know, at least not when it came to her emotional state. Deep down, he knew this was toxic, he knew her words affected him, but he also knew she couldn’t help it— or, realistically, she could help it, she just felt like she couldn’t. He rubbed her back as she sobbed, trying his best to soothe her as she continued to ramble, “You’re too nice... you’re in your every right to be pissed... I swear, sometimes I think you were blessed with the patience of a saint... and here I am,

crying like an idiot over my own actions... I don't deserve you, Ki..." To that, he smiled softly, pulling away just enough to look her in the eyes, "I'm patient with you because I know you better than anyone else in this town... I know you don't mean the things you say... mostly, anyway. Plus, you're my friend. Friends are there to protect each other." And through her tear-stained face, she smiled, a weak, pathetic smile, but a smile nonetheless, "I guess you're right..."

For a split second, it felt like it was just the two of them, nobody else. It felt like there wasn't a whole group of students staring at them, some of them filming. It felt... nice. It felt nice to not feel like you're constantly being watched. Of course, they were being watched, but it didn't feel like it. A few

students giggled at them, pointing, but they clung together for a moment longer before the bell rang and everyone dispersed through the halls. They didn't move though, for a moment longer, they stood together, their breaths synchronized. Finally, they pulled away, smiling at each other, "You're the best friend I could've ever asked for." She smiled at him, and he nodded in response, ruffling her hair and messing it all up, "And you're my favorite person in this town." He grinned, laughing softly. They walked together to class and sat in their respective seats, occasionally casting glances at each other.

By the time their third period ended, it was lunch. The gossip of what happened earlier had spread through the whole school. All of

it. The anger, the hug, every last word they uttered. Finnley and Kiran snuck outside and hid in the garden to eat their lunch together. It was sort of their secret spot, where they first met all the way back in kindergarten. Turn back time and you'd be met with a tiny Finnley playing in the rain, singing the song her mom taught her, she'd been spinning and jumping around when she saw a tiny figure in the distance. He'd been staring at her in awe, and then would run up to her, splashing mud everywhere. "You! You're a fairy! A real fairy!" he screamed in delight, and when he got mud all over her, she laughed and threw mud back at him, staining his pale skin. "I'm a fairy!" She yelled back, and although it was meant as a question, it came out more like a

statement. And so they both jumped around, yelling about fairies. It wasn't long until her father came and separated them, grumbling something about how dirty kids are, but that didn't stop them from having lunch together every day and it definitely didn't stop Kiran from bragging to everyone that he was friends with a fairy.

Back in the present, Finnley shook her head, leaning back, "I got into an argument with my dad."

"Again..?"

"Yes. Again."

"Damn... What was it about this time?"

"Oh, nothing much. When I got back from the hospital he called me self-absorbed and

stuff and he told me he lost his job. So, naturally, I got my own job to help out but when he found out what I'm getting paid, he just lashed out at me like it was my fault or something.”