

month ago, and since then, the Pumpkin Spice Supreme had become a local favorite.

Now, as Daniel steamed the milk and pumpkin puree together and poured them over the espresso in the special YOU HAD ME AT CELLO coffee mug he kept behind the counter for me, I thought back to how Daniel's coffee talent had begun.

I was in second grade when my mom left. She'd walked out the door with a blunt, "I want sidewalk cafés, cappuccinos, and grand adventures. *Not* being snowed in for seven months out of every year." After that, I became convinced that if I could learn to make a "cappu-whatever," I could get Mom back. Daniel, who'd lost his dad in a car accident when he was too little to remember, wanted to help. So, in his typical larger-than-life fashion, he decided we'd learn to make dozens of coffee drinks, to prepare for Mom's return. After school one day, we walked to the Snug Mug to ask Marley if he could teach us, and he agreed. In the end, though, it was Daniel who had developed the coffee talent, while I fell in love with the cello.

“Here you go,” Daniel said now, squeezing a spiraling mountain of whipped cream atop my coffee. He added three anise seeds, a cinnamon stick, and a lacy sprinkling of cinnamon. “A one-of-a-kind drink for a one-of-a-kind Nadi.”

“Why, thank you.” I picked up the mug and breathed in the delicious scent of pumpkin, nutmeg, and cinnamon.

“Hey,” Brandon teased. “How come Nadine got hers first? Where’s my Heavenly Hazelnut? And Elle’s Radical Raspberry Mocha?” He pulled an exaggerated pout while Elle laughed beside him.

“Patience is a virtue,” Daniel said, his dark brown eyes sparkling as he got to work on the next order.

I took a slow, deep sip of my pumpkin spice latte. The taste made me think of hayrides, bonfires, and crisp autumn nights under winking stars. It made me think of Chopin’s Cello Sonata, Opus 65, and the way playing it conjured images of flaming leaves trickling down from trees. “Mmm.” I took a second sip. “It gets better every time.” With my free hand, I reached into my book bag for my wallet, but, as always, Daniel waved me off.

“Stop,” he said. “You know you guys are all VIP customers.”

“Aw, thanks.” I put my wallet back inside my bag and as I did, my thick daily planner fell out. Elle leaned down to pick it up.

She regarded my planner with a smirk. “Is there a ‘Snug Mug hang time’ reminder in here?” she asked. Elle liked to rib me about my so-called color-coded life, but I loved the rainbow of Post-its spanning my planner’s pages—little “to-dos” I could pull off as I did them. “Or is there a Post-it for the Fall Formal? *If* you’re actually going this year.”

“Not likely.” I grabbed the planner from her, laughing. “Daniel and I can’t cancel our annual John Hughes movie marathon.”

“Not a chance.” Daniel grinned.

Daniel and I loved eighties movies, and we had skipped the last two years’ formals in favor of our tradition. Daniel’s favorite movie was *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*. Given the fact that Daniel had once skipped school to sneak onto the set of a movie being filmed at Killington, and actually ended up in a shot, he was doing a pretty good job of living like Ferris.

“Just you wait. I’m going to write *Fall Formal* on a Post-it and

stick it in there.” Elle jabbed a finger at my planner. “If the planner wills it, it shall be so.”

“Hey. Don’t knock the planner,” I protested. “It’s saved Daniel’s neck a time or two.” Not only did I keep track of *my* homework assignments and due dates, but Daniel’s, too. I’d offered to start doing that after he’d turned in his third late project.

“True,” Daniel said, smiling mischievously. “But sometimes you have to embrace the unexpected to suck the marrow out of life.”

“I don’t need to embrace anything right now except my bow in some serious practicing.” I glanced at my cello case, feeling its pull even from half a dozen feet away.

Elle was about to respond when her phone rang. She stepped away to answer it, and I could tell by her switch from English into irritated Spanish that it was her youngest brother, Miguel, calling to complain about their older brother, Juan. Brandon stepped aside to put a soothing arm around her.

Daniel focused his gaze on me. Like always, he seemed to read my mind. “Stressing about your Interlochen audition already?”

“Already?” I repeated in disbelief. “The audition is in two weeks, and I still haven’t decided on my final composition piece.”

“Nadi, you were born ready for this audition.” Daniel opened the mini fridge under the counter to get out a container of milk for Elle’s drink. “You’re the best cellist at our school!”

“Thanks, but that doesn’t matter,” I argued. “Kids from all over the country apply to the summer music camp program. The competition is *so* intense.”

I’d dreamed of attending Interlochen Center for the Arts summer camp since sixth grade, when our school’s orchestra director, Maestro Claudio, had given me a camp brochure. I wanted to be a professional cellist someday, and honing my skills at a fine arts school like Interlochen would help pave the way. First, though, I had to get accepted.

“I started a new composition today in orchestra.” I pulled my phone out of my back pocket. “I recorded what I have so far.” I took a deep breath. Daniel had never said no to hearing my new pieces, but asking him still made me nervous. Letting

anyone listen to my compositions felt like baring my soul. “Want to listen?”

His hand, holding the portafilter full of pressed espresso grounds, paused. Then he smiled widely, and relief washed over me. This smile had won me over on the playground in kindergarten, when Daniel had invited me to make mud pies with him (he mashed the pies together while I organized them on a makeshift musical staff made of sticks). This smile had begun our friendship years ago and made me feel like we’d be friends forever. “Do I want to listen?” He locked the portafilter in place and set two espresso shot glasses underneath as the enticing, dark liquid streamed down. “Do I want to see the pyramids? Bike down Haleakala? Snorkel in the Great Barrier Reef?”

I laughed. Daniel was dying to do all of that, along with about a thousand other adventures on his bucket list. “Okay, okay. You want to hear it.”

Just then, Marley appeared beside Daniel, cell phone in hand. “Hey, can you hold down the fort?” Marley asked. He was glancing out the front window at a sleek Range Rover that had just

pulled into the parking lot. “I’ll be back in a few.” Daniel nodded, and Marley headed for the shop’s door with Shredder close behind, tail wagging.

Brandon and Elle returned to the counter. Elle was grumbling about her brothers, but perked up when Daniel handed her a steaming cup of Radical Raspberry Mocha.

“Don’t worry, your drink is up next,” Daniel told Brandon before he could ask. Daniel rolled his eyes at me, deadpanning, “A genius’s work is never done.”

He grabbed another cup from the shelf and turned back to the espresso machine. Then he froze, staring past me toward the Snug Mug’s front door, his jaw going slack.

“Daniel?” I said. “You okay?”

He nodded vaguely, but his eyes were fixed on the door. The cup in his hands slipped, shattering on the floor with an echoing crash. I hurried to help Daniel clean up the broken pieces, but he still hadn’t moved. In fact, he seemed completely oblivious to the cup smashing and everything else. I nudged him gently.

“Daniel?” I whispered. “You’re freaking me out. Blink if you can hear me.” He blinked as his cheeks reddened. “Wha—” I started, but as I followed his gaze, I saw for myself.

In the doorway of the Snug Mug stood the most beautiful girl I’d ever seen. She had big brown eyes with long lashes, bow-shaped lips, and luminous brown skin set off by her purple hat and matching coat. She was gazing right at Daniel, who still hadn’t moved, as if he was under the girl’s spell.

Who was she, and what had she just done to my best friend?

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Chapter Two

“Hey, Snug Muggers!” Marley called from the doorway. He stood beside the mystery girl and a tall, broad-shouldered man who was nearly as handsome as the girl was gorgeous. I guessed they were father and daughter. The man wore a dark dress coat that was out of place here among the hand-knitted sweaters and beanie caps of the Snug Mug customers.

“I—well, *we*—have an announcement to make.” Marley glanced at the man and girl. “This is Mr. James Renaud and his daughter, Kiya. And . . . the Renauds are the new owners of the Snug Mug!”

Marley started applauding enthusiastically, and so did a handful of out-of-towners who had no idea that this was, in fact, terrible news. From around the room came gasps and sad mutterings of “What?” or “Why?” I glanced at Daniel in confusion, but my best friend was still staring at the new girl.

“I know it’s a shock to some of you,” Marley went on gently, “but I’ve been planning a ‘rewirement’ for a while.” He leaned over to give Shredder a pat, and the dog let out a happy bark. “Shredder and I will always be Snug Muggers. I won’t be behind the counter anymore, that’s all. You’ll be in great hands with the Renauds. They’ve moved up here from New York City, so let’s give them a proper welcome.” Marley then began walking the Renauds from table to table, introducing them.

“Can you believe it?” Elle asked. “Marley’s owned the Mug since before we were born!”

“It’s the end of an era,” Brandon said forlornly.

“I know.” I was gathering the broken pieces of the cup from the floor again. “Daniel, did Marley tell you about this?”