

-Griffon-

The game was go'n well for Nicky, for a while—when I got there. It takes about ten minutes to get to the fields— when walking uphill. My arms had never had such a big workout.

Ashlyn was do'n a great job pitch'n, but there were some hits. The score was three to one, and our school wasn't not win'n.

“Hey Griffon.”

I looked up as Mr Rames, Nicky's dad, sat down next to me as Nicky's mom followed.

“Oh, hey.”

He took one glance at the score and shook his head. “Nicky is not happy.”

I nodded my head as Nicky's mom nodded. “She really needs to get a punching bag.”

Mr Rames fixed his hair and sighed. Look, I'm just gonna say it. Nicky would deny it, but her dad looked like Chris Prat with a minor dad bod. Nicky's mo:had similar brown hair that was long and curly, with similar skin color. Somehow two browned hair people with peachy skin made a pale girl with lots of freckles and red hair. Some genes.

“How 'you feeling Griffon?”

I looked at Nicky's dad and shrugged.

“Better.” I mumbled. “Still feel weird about it.”

“Probably the stress and everything.” Mrs Rames said with a shrug. “Minor PTSD, but you'll be fine. It's their to keep you from doing anything to get your heart worked up.”

I nodded and gave a small sigh. Even though Nicky's mom was an actual therapist, the idea didn't sound fun. I preferred to be told this stuff by my dad, or just hear'n it from Nicky.

“Mike, I gotta go in a few minutes.” She mumbled looking at her watch.

“Alright, just be back as soon as you can with the car.” Mr Rames said softly.

She nodded and walked off as the inn'n ended. Mr Rames gave a small sigh and took a sip of his water.

I watched as Nicky walked over to home plate in her catch's gear, and I smiled. She glanced over as me and her dad waved, then I could tell her face reddened from under that mask. She looked away and squatted down as Ashlyn went to do some warmup pitches.

I glanced nervously at Mr Rames, and tapped my legs nervously just hope'n to feel someth'n other than nervousness.

“Uh... I gotta small question for you.” I muttered.

“Ask away Griffon. I'm married to a therapist, I know things.” He said with a joke'n smile.

I nodded and rubbed my legs nervously. “Would you uh... let Nicky like date— hypothetically.”

Mr Rames sighed and tilted his head. He looked at Nicky and tapped his foot.

“Hypothetically?”

“Mhm.” I uttered under my breath. “And like, have a boyfriend?”

Mr Rames gave another sigh and looked at Nicky more as she caught the ball. He but his lip and thought for a good minute.

“Depends on the guy.”

I nodded as Ashlyn struck a girl out.

“Would I be categorized in a good way? You know, hypothetically.” I asked carefully.

Mr Rames looked up at me and took a deep breath.

“You have your own category there Conners.”

I nodded and asked, “What is it?”

“If you date my daughter, and you only, you gotta marry her.” He said firmly. “I know she wouldn't ever break your heart, but if you break her's, I'll break you.”

I nodded timidly and looked down.

“But, you have to marry her.” He said again. “I trust you with my girl— or I should at least. I've known you for— how old are you again?”

I gave a small smile and answered, “Seventeen.”

“Well, I've known you for fourteen years then.” Mr Rames said with a small smile. He then stopped

and blinked. “I... I’m old.”

“Not as old as my parents.” I said with a smirk. “Dad’s turn’n fifty in September.”

“Really?!”

“Mhm, Kevin’s turn’n twenty four in December.” Mr Rames smiled then it happened.

A noise caught us off guard as a yell of pain sounded. We looked up as Ashlyn hit the ground as a girl dove into second, not even think’s about it.

Ashlyn was on the ground, holding her neck as Nicky jumped up and threw her mask down.

I looked around in a panic as I watched Austin come sprint’n down a hill that overlooked the field.

Our school athletic trainer ran over and started talking all gibberish as the team dropped their glove and ran over. The couches pushed Nicky and some other girls out of the way and I watched Nicky throw her chest armor stuff off.

“Uh oh.” Mr Rames uttered getting up.

I watched Nicky flat out charge the hitter before an umpire grab her and held her back. Mr Rames jumped up and ran onto the field— which I’m guess’s ain’t aloud but they let him on.

He stood in front of Nicky and put his hands on her shoulders and eyed her hard but used his thumbs to rub her shoulders to maybe get the anger down.

I hadn’t seen Nicky get this angry since that time I smashed her head in cake last year. She grabbed the cake and ran after me— because I could run then—, tackled me like a wrestler, and smashed the rest of the cake in my face.

Good times— uh but this is not one.

I reached down and unlocked the lock th’n on the wheelchair and wheeled myself over to her. Is wheel a proper way of say’n that?

Nicky stormed into the dugout as her dad walked over.

“That girl is mad.”

“Yeah she is.”

Mr Rames got a worried look as Nicky came out of the dugout and starting warming Gadaí up to pitch. Based off warmups she wasn’t pitch’n to well.

Nicky’s face was stressed, and all they needed was an out. I watched as a girl hit a bomb to right field as the girl on second ran home. The score was 4-2 and it didn’t take long for the last out.

I watched as Nicky marched to the dugout with a fire in her eyes.

~Nichole~

The stupid batter had hit the ball and it came like a bullet at Ashlyn’s neck. I was prepared to jump the stupid lady before the umpires, Coach Kile, and dad held me back— for some reason.

Gadaí thought it was funny that I was threatened to be thrown out of the game, and I had to resist the urge to grab her by the throat and strangle her.

Ashlyn had the bench as she laid there with wide eyes and an ice pack around her neck. A paramedic was coming but our athletic trainer made sure to say it wasn’t a big emergency.

“Sup.”

Ashlyn looked up and waved. She gave me a thumbs up and took a deep breath. She was told not to talk much, but it kind of sucked.

“Hey big shot, how are you?” Yelena asked walking over.

Ashlyn gave another thumbs up as Lily sighed, “It’s a shame. Last game of the year and exams next week.”

“And it’s districts.” Jenna pointed out, setting her glove down.

Ashlyn gave a groan as I folded my arms. I would’ve gladly been the one to get hurt instead of her. Especially now that Gadaí had to pitch, because she wasn’t doing as well as she was in warmups.

“We’ll be fine.” Gadaí hissed. “We’re going to win now anyways.”

“Never say that.” Coach called as he walked to third base. He looked at us and shook his head.

“Never say that.”

When Coach looked away Gadaí mocked him before rolling her eyes.

I rolled mine too. Grey and Livy glanced around, looked at each other, and sighed. They pulled me aside and pulled me to the end of the dugout and I blinked.

“What?”

“Your in the hole next.” Gary said firmly.

She grabbed my helmet and bat and handed it to me as I looked up and blinked. Grey had long blonde hair that was tied back. She had peachy skin with a freckle on her left cheek bone and had similar silvery eyes to Austin. Her hair was definitely not as blonde as his, but it was blonde.

“Three outs could happen and that’s end of game.” I said firmly. “Plus I don’t know her pitching style and will probably strike out.”

“Exactly.” Livy said firmly. “We know her style, and you won’t strike out.” She said with a smirk, fixing her shoulder length brown hair.

She had brown eyes too, that seemed to light up easily. Unlike Grey, her skin was covered with freckles, and she was tall and skinny.

Her and Grey weren’t related but they might as well be. The way they talked, and interacted sometimes could make you think they might at least be long distance cousins, but they weren’t. I blinked as Grey patted my shoulder. “Watch the first pitch, it’s a rise ball. The next will be a curve into then away from you. Pick of you want to hit it or not because sometimes it won’t curve.” She said firmly.

“If you make it last that, she’ll throw a four seemed right down the middle.” Livy uttered.

We looked up as Gina struck out.

“Your in the hole!” Grey said patting my back.

“What?”

“Mhm! Get in the hole!” Livy said pushing me.

“But what about the other pitches?!”

“We don’t know.” Grey said with a shrug. “We didn’t make it that far.”

I blinked and was about to protest before I heard the crack of the bat. I looked up as Yelena ran through first.

“Now your on deck!” Livy said shoving me out of the dugout.

“NO NO NO!” I yelled. “Tell em more!”

“Get in the circle!” Grey hissed.

I nodded and walked out of the dugout nervously. I came to the end, and made a circle and looked back into the dugout.

“Anything else?!” I asked with a hiss.

Livy and Grey thought for a moment before shaking their heads at me. I groaned as Grey and Livy sighed.

“You’ll be fine.”

“Are you sure about that?!”

“Fast ball in three... two...”

I looked up and got ready as the pitcher threw her fast ball. I took a hard practice swing and my eyes widened.

“She’s fast! I can’t catch that.”

“You’ll be fine, I—”

The crack of the bat sounded as Della ran to first. Yelena sprinted and dove into third, and beat the throw.

“Your up.” Grey said.

“You’ll do great.” Livy said firmly.

I gulped hard as my name was called and my stupid walk up song that I had chosen to calm me down came on. It didn’t calm me down this time.

I glanced back at my dad and Griffon who were talking. They looked up smiled, and I felt my face heat up. I glanced at Coach, who didn’t look over to me. He was talking to the girls in the dugout about something.

I looked up and stepped into the box nervously as our first base Coach/ Hitting Coach, Coach Jakes.

“Hit the ball like in practice!” He encouraged.

I nodded nervously as my thoughts ran. What did Grey and Livy say? Something about a rise ball?

Well—

The ball came and I held back.

“Ball!” The umpire called.

I gave a sigh of relief. Next would be the curve, that would go either way. The next thing I knew I ducked down as the ball came for my head.

I looked up as the pitcher gave a small sneer and smirk.

Okay, I may have deserved that. The pitcher was the girl I almost attacked.

I took a deep breath and stepped out of the box. I fixed my grip and looked at Coach who gave me a sign of, ‘Up to you’— not my favorite sign.

I stepped back into the box and took a deep breath. The fast ball was next.

The ball came and I swung as hard as I could, and missed.

“Don’t step out!” Coach Jakes called. “Keep your head in, take a deep breath, and swing away.” He said a little more calmly.

I nodded and got back into the box. My mind raced as I panicked some.

I didn’t know what was next. Livy and Grey only had the first three pitches. Now, I’m on four, and the count is 2-1.

I glanced around before stepping back in the box. The pitch came and I stared as the went right down the middle. I gulped hard as I stepped out of the box. I looked at Coach as he took a deep breath.

“Smooth swing, ease your breath better. Remember to breath.”

I gave a nod and took a deep breath. I stepped into the box and the next pitch came. I swung the bat as hard as possible as I heard, and felt, the ball ricksha off. My eyes widened as I burst off into a sprint as Coach told me to keep going. I wasn’t looking, but the next thing I knew the dugout exploded. I looked up as my whole team ran out, when I stopped running and looked.

I watched the ball fall far behind the fence

My eyes widened as I burst off running past second base as my adrenaline went through the roof. My team was surrounding home plate as I jumped onto it.

It took me a good second to even register what happened as Livy and Grey hoisted me up.

“TOLD YOU!” Grey said with a grin.

“Uh, no, no you didn’t!” I said quickly with wide eyes.

“We told you what the first three pitches were.” Livy said with a shrug. “So, yeah, we told you.”

I didn’t protest as Coach Kile walked over and gave me a high five. I looked around and out as Gadaí didn’t know to congratulate me or say something rude.

I gave her a smile and patted her head as the girls dropped me. I looked up at the score board as my smile grew. I had hit a three run homer. We were ahead by one run.

We were winning and only had one inning left, and nobody could’ve said it batter than Coach.

“One run isn’t a lot girls! Hold ‘em when it gets to the last inning!”

I gave a nod and walked into the dugout. I got some water and gave a small smile as I put my catching gear on. Something about the dugout felt like home. It always did. I picked up my water and took a sip.

~Nichole~

I leaned my head back against the wall and set my water down. The dugout was empty as Coach walked in.

“You ready Nicky?”

I looked up and gave a shrug. “I don’t know.”

Coach Kile gave a small sigh and sat down next to me. “You have people waiting for you, and I would like to go home. What’s going up in your brain?”

I gave a small shrug and sighed, “The season’s over. I hit my home run, but we lost.”

Coach gave a small sigh and looked up at the score board. It was 6-5, and we lost in the last inning.

Bases had loaded, Gadal gave up a run. Claire Thomas, our right fielder, had told her to calm down but she didn't. She struck out next, and soon after the other girls did.

Coach gave a small sigh and folded his arms. We sat in the dugout and watched a bird sit on the right field fence.

"Nicky, I don't really care about wins or losses. I mean, I care about lot about that, but I care more about how you girls are doing. Yeah, we lost the last game and district game, but it's not about that. There's more to life than hitting a ball and winning some fake gold trophy."

I gave a small chuckle as Coach gave me a fist bump.

"Come on Nicky, you gotta get home."

I gave a small nod and stood up. I packed my things and Coach Kile grabbed the keys to lock up the field.

"I'm proud of you. Next year for senior year, I expect more than one home run kiddo." He said pointing a finger.

"Alright Coach, I got you."

Coach smiled as I walked out and over to Dad, Mom, and Griffon. Mom gave me a small smile as Dad walked up with some flowers.

"I know you didn't win, but you know, I got you a little something."

I gave him a small smile and a small hug.

"I'm going to go get the car with your mom, hand me your stuff."

I nodded and did so as Dad walked off with mom. Griffon pulled his wheelchair up.

"Well well well, guess who gets nachos for dinner." He said with a smirk.

"Me, or you?"

Griffon gave a shrug and pushed his hair up. "Both of us, Ma said I can have dinner with y'all. Your dad invited me."

"Oh, good." I said sarcastically. "I hope mom didn't use pork."

Griffon gave a shrug. "My dad doesn't eat pig, I do... sometimes."

I rolled my eyes and looked at Griffon as he pushed his wheelchair into me. I rolled my eyes and sat down in his lap and gave a small sigh.

"It ain't my favorite thing but I'll eat it if I have to."

I rolled my eyes and crackled my knuckles. Griffon gave me a small goofy smile, and I rolled my eyes with a small smile.

"So, I was think'n." He said carefully. "How do you feel about Applebees?"

I gave a small shrug and looked at him. "Get to the point."

"I don't know, maybe we can go out and stuff."

I gave a small smile as Dad pulled the truck around. He helped Griffon into the truck and we all went home.

Griffon had made the decision to not say much, but I didn't really mind. He pulled out his phone and started playing Wordole again, and I watched. I put my head on his shoulder and Griffon grabbed my hand as he found the word, 'Grind'.

"That's a word?"

"Mhm, means to reduce someth'n." He mumbled with a small.

I gave a small nod and Griffon squeezed my hand. His hand was soft but firm. Like a pillow, but with a grip.

We got back to my place and dad sent me to the back of his truck to get Griffon's wheelchair. We got inside and mom finished the nachos and got some salsa.

We went to sit at the snack bar— which was the counter in the kitchen— before we quickly figured our Griffon physical couldn't sit on a stool.

We sat at the table and started to eat. Mom had made the nachos split in half, one side with pork and the other without with a substitute of chicken. Mom and Dad finished fairly quickly and went outside to talk, leaving Griffon and I.

I'd never seen a human inhaler before but I did.

"Slow down!" I said with an eye roll.

“No.” Griffon snapped with his mouth full of chips.

“Dude, your going to stuff yourself full.”

Griffon rolled his eyes and finished the last chip. He looked up innocently before giving a thumbs up.

I rolled my eyes and Griffon gave a small smile and grabbed his wheelchair.

“What are you doing?”

“Getting around places, what do you think Nicky?”

I rolled my eyes again and ended up following him to my room. I opened the door with a small sigh as Griffon pushed himself in. He looked around and looked at my mirror, and pushed himself over to it.

He grabbed some of the photos I had stuck there and gave a small smile.

“I remember these.”

I walked over as he grabbed more. He handed me a few and I gave a small smile. One was from fifth grade. We were sitting in some steps outside of a nature park for a field trip. I had an arm around Griffon and gave a big smile.

I stared at the photo and tilted my head.

“Your blushing in this one.” I uttered.

“Huh?”

I handed him the photo back as his face went white.

“Oh yeah... huh. That’s when I first started like’n you and all.” He said with a small smile. “I didn’t think I could blush that red.”

I gave him a small smile and put the photo back on the mirror.

“Your crazy for that.” I said with a small chuckle. “Fifth grade is a long time.”

“Yeah.” Griffon said fixing his hair. “It is.”

He handed me another one, and it was from ninth grade. I gave a small groan as Griffon looked up.

“What?”

“That zit.” I said pointing to the photo. “That’s way to big.”

“That was from two years ago!” He snapped. “Can’t judge your past self.”

“Well I am. NO! The bangs?! Ninth grade will forever be forgotten buddy.” I said handing him the photo back.

“I like it.” He said with a small smile.

I gave him a smile as he grabbed my arm and pulled me over. I sat down on his lap and Griffon wrapped an arm around me. We started going through them and the more I looked at them, the more I really realized how long I had actually known Griffon. In August, it’d be fifteen years.

I looked at the photos and watched Griffon try to slide one away from my eyesight.

“What’s that one?”

“Uh... what one?”

I rolled my eyes and went to grab it from his hand, but he held his arm up.

“Griffon give it to me!”

“No!”

I stood up and went to grab it from his hand before he swapped hands. I folded my arms and tried to snatch it but he moved his hand father away.

“Let me see!”

“NO!”

I rolled my eyes and snatched for his arm but he flung it away.

“It’s my photo!”

“I don’t really care! It deserves to be burned!” He snapped with a slight voice crack.

I rolled my eyes and tapped my foot. Griffon looked at me carefully before giving a grown. He handed me the photo face down and I looked at it.

I burst out laughing as Griffon started grumbling to himself.

“So, we can burn that right?” He asked coldly.

“NO! This is flat out the best photos of you I have!”

“Yeah... sure.”

I showed Griffon the photo from middle school as he glared at it. He had a mulle, and his curly hair

that he always had in the front was pretty much chopped like awful bangs.

"You can put that away now." He said carefully.

"I still have the yearbook."

"We can burn that."

"Don't judge your past self." I reminded him. "I mean, that was three years ago."

Griffon rolled his eyes and gave me a fake smile. He looked up at the photos he had, and started putting them back. I helped him out some, before giving a sign. I looked at my best friend as he gave me a small real smile.

I sat down on his lap and he put his hands on my shoulders.

"I think we need to get a updated photo."

I looked up at Griffon and gave a small nod. I pulled my phone out and helped it up to the mirror and gave a small smile. Griffon gave his smile, and made sure to do something stupid at the same time.

"Get another one." He said with a smile. "I think we need some more."

I got another one, and he kissed my cheek. I gave a small smile and looked up at him.

"Exams next week. Did you study?"

"I've been study'n Nicky, you know that."

I gave a nod as Griffon looked at me. "Have you been study'n?"

"Nope."

"Need a Tudor?" He asked with a smirk. "I'm good at that stuff."

I rolled my eyes and Griffon wrapped his arms around me.

"I could."

"Good."

I looked up at the mirror and smiled. It all started to click in my brain. Everything that had happened was just a small step. Every time I felt like sitting down or stopping, it wasn't really that bad. The bad things are what brings us together.

My best friend got paralyzed.

So what? Big deal.

If he hadn't I don't think I'd be sitting in his lap, and feeling like an absolute winner at life.

I think God does weird stuff like that to make us see what we have, and why it's important. It's not just about what we want, but what we need in our lives to make us who we are. Looking back, think God used Griffon to show me that. I don't think it was until Griffin got his heart attack that I realized that we don't have long. We could be dead any minute.

But, I got my best friend back.

Now, here I am as he says annoying stuff and kisses my cheek. I mean, he's the only guy in the world to be annoying and lovable at once. Maybe I should explain a little better.

Your in your dugout. The place where you feel safe, or secure. It's not until you have to leave it when the nerves get up. You have to take the step and swing into the unknown, even if it could be bad.

We don't want to be prisoners to our own doubt and fear.

Senior years is coming up, and I know that it'll be hard. I know that things will come up. I also know, that faith will meet me.

All that there is left to say is, see you next year.