

## The Start of a Great Friendship

DECEMBER 1, 2020

By Olivia May

Multicolored threads slowly unraveled as they were disturbed by shaky yet determined fingers. A girl with wavy brown hair and blue eyes picked at her paisley sweater, her leg bouncing up and down rapidly. Her half-bitten nails struggled to grip the loose string.

She didn't even notice what she was doing until her mother spoke from the driver's seat. "Charlotte, please don't destroy that new sweater I just bought."

Charlotte quickly clasped her hands together. "Sorry, Mom...", she mumbled.

"It's alright, sweetheart. I know you're nervous, but I'm sure you'll do just fine," her mother reassured.

Charlotte sighed, adjusting her tortoiseshell-colored glasses, turning her attention to the view outside the car window. *Yeah, I'm nervous. How could I not be?* She was on her way to her first day of middle school, and because they had recently moved across town, Charlotte didn't know anyone there.

Charlotte's mother sensed her nervousness and glanced at her in the rearview mirror. "I'm sure you'll make lots of friends. You're very energetic and friendly, and extroverts make friends like that!" she said, snapping her fingers.

*If only I was just... extroverted.* Charlotte thought. It was true that she was energetic. She would even say that, yes, she was pretty friendly. There was a lot more to it though. She knew it, her mom knew it, and soon everyone at her new school would no doubt know it, too.

Speaking of which, the car pulled up to the school building. Her mom stopped the car and turned around to look at Charlotte. "Well, have a good day. Try to focus and behave, and remember to be yourself!" she said as her daughter stepped out of the car.

"Well, which one? I can't do both." Charlotte said before she could stop herself. She sighed with regret as her mother gave her an incredulous look. "Sorry... I'll try. Thanks, Mom," she said, before walking off toward the building.

The middle school was one level with several hallways going in different directions. It reminded Charlotte of a maze. Although only one floor, it actually had about as many students and teachers as her elementary school, which had three floors. When she walked in, her first task was to go to the office to get her class schedule.

*It's easy... Just introduce yourself and ask for your schedule.* Charlotte told herself. She took a deep breath and entered the office. "Um... excuse me? Could I have my— I mean, m-my name is Charlotte, and I'm here for my..." she trailed off. By the time she remembered to introduce herself, she had forgotten what she was supposed to ask for. She blushed and desperately tried to remember.

Thankfully, the woman at the desk smiled and said, "Ah, yes, you're a new student. I'm guessing you're here for your class schedule?"

Charlotte sighed with relief and nodded. The next thing she knew, she was standing outside the office with a schedule and a small map of the school. When she made it to the first fork in the hallway, Charlotte made sure no one was looking before making L's with her hands and turning to the left. She soon stood in front of her classroom, feeling a sense of accomplishment.

When she entered the classroom, Charlotte felt multiple eyes on her. Before she could get too nervous, the teacher spoke in an upbeat voice. "Ah, hello! You must be Charlotte."

Charlotte nodded and went to sit down at an empty desk. A girl with short blonde hair sitting next to her smiled. She was wearing a purple shirt with Tinkerbell on it. Charlotte's heart soared at the sight of a fellow Disney fan. Thoughts raced through her mind: *Who's her favorite Disney princess? Favorite movie? Has she seen every Disney movie? Has she ever been to Disney World?* Throughout the class, that was all she could think about.

When class was over, Charlotte excitedly went up to the girl, who saw her coming and smiled. "Hi, it's nice to meet you. My name is—"

Charlotte interrupted her. "Hi! I'm Charlotte; what's your favorite Disney movie?!" The girl looked a bit surprised. "Oh, uh... I don't know, 'Lion King' I guess?"

"That's great! I love that one too. I also like 'Beauty and the Beast', 'Lilo and Stitch', 'Mulan', and, of course, 'Peter Pan'! I noticed you were wearing a Tinkerbell shirt. Have you seen the 'Tinkerbell' movies? I heard another one is coming out this year." Charlotte rambled. It wasn't like she didn't know she was rambling. In fact, Charlotte was very aware of it, but she couldn't seem to stop. *What are you doing? You interrupted her and now you're just talking and talking! Stop being weird, you don't even know her name!* she thought in a panic.

Charlotte grimaced when she finally stopped talking, and sure enough, the girl had that look on her face Charlotte knew all too well: polite but clearly uncomfortable. "Oh yeah, that's nice. Yeah... my aunt got me this shirt. I haven't actually seen the movie, so..."

"O-Oh... okay, yeah... sorry. I didn't— er..." Charlotte stammered with a blush. Thankfully, the bell that signified second period rang. The girl awkwardly walked off. Charlotte inwardly groaned and went to her next class, feeling like a freak.

She hardly said a word the rest of the day. Every time she wanted to say something, her impulse was held back by the fear of embarrassing herself again.

After school, Charlotte's mother came to pick her up. She asked how her day had been, and Charlotte just shrugged, avoiding eye contact. Her mother didn't pressure Charlotte, recognizing her daughter's mood. She simply turned on Charlotte's music playlist as she drove her to a counseling appointment.

When she pulled into the parking lot, Charlotte gave her mom a small smile, before entering the building. Dr. Sherman was waiting for her. "Hello, Charlotte. Come on in."

They sat down, and Dr. Sherman studied her face. "I know you moved closer to the clinic recently and started at a new school, right? Tell me about that."

Charlotte sighed. "It was terrible, I interrupted someone and just rambled on about something she didn't know anything about, but I thought she did, and now she probably thinks I'm weird!" she grumbled.

"I see. Did she tell you that you're weird?" Dr. Sherman asked.

"Well... no, but she gave me this look, like she regretted talking to me," Charlotte admitted. "And I am weird. I probably don't deserve a friend like her anyway."

Dr. Sherman folded her hands and said, "Look at me Charlotte. You are not 'weird.' You have ADHD, something that millions of children and adults deal with. You deserve friends and happiness just as much as anyone else. How your brain works is not your fault, and you can't help it. You have a lot of passion, and if you can remember to wait and let other people talk about their passions, too, people will see what a great friend I know you can be."

Charlotte sighed as she took in Dr. Sherman's words. "How do I do that?" she asked. Dr. Sherman smiled. "Well, that's something we can work on."

Later, Charlotte left the appointment actually feeling pretty good. That often happened with her sessions. She would go in feeling weird or like she had failed at... well... life. But Dr. Sherman always helped to put things in perspective. Her ADHD caused her emotions to be all over the place, but the counseling gave her some respite, at least temporarily.

When she got into the car, Charlotte's mother noticed her improved demeanor and smiled. "I take it the appointment went well?"

Charlotte nodded, buckling her seatbelt. "Yeah, it did. Sorry for being so moody earlier."

Charlotte's mother put a hand on her shoulder. "I know there have been a lot of transitions for us lately, which are especially hard on you. If you ever want to talk about anything, I'm here," she said gently.

Charlotte smiled. "I know. Thanks Mom."

The next day, Charlotte was ready for school. The interaction with that girl yesterday had been awkward, but there were many other opportunities to make connections. She put her hair in a simple ponytail and went downstairs to eat breakfast.

The morning was a busy blur. Charlotte's mother was rushing around to get ready for her job interview. Finn, Charlotte's little brother, was sitting in his highchair, eating and playing with cheerios. After breakfast was over, her mother got ready to drop Charlotte off at school. Charlotte helped get Finn cleaned up and into the car, earning both a grateful smile from her mother and a few fistfuls of Cheerios thrown in her face. Charlotte didn't mind too much though. At least their family was at peace.

At school, Charlotte quickly found the girl she had talked to yesterday and went up to her. The girl looked a bit uncomfortable when she saw Charlotte approach, but she smiled sweetly. Charlotte returned the smile and said, "Hey... I just wanted to apologize about yesterday. I was nervous about my first day here, and when I saw your shirt, I was so excited that I focused more on that than on getting to know you. I'm Charlotte. What's your name?" Her voice was mostly steady, with only a little shakiness. Practicing with Dr. Sherman had helped to alleviate a lot of nervousness.

The girl waved her hand dismissively. "Oh, it's fine. We all get like that sometimes. I'm

Rachel. It's nice to meet you, Charlotte."

Charlotte nodded and went to ask what Rachel's interests were, when the bell rang. "Well, have a good day, Rachel. We can talk after class if you want to."

"Uh-huh, bye," Rachel said with a small wave before heading into class.

Charlotte did try to talk to Rachel after class, but she was out of the door as soon as it ended.

Charlotte tried to put the thought that Rachel was avoiding her out of her mind. It was lunchtime. The cafeteria was a great place to make new friends.

She walked in and scanned the room for people sitting alone or people who just seemed friendly. She spotted someone at a table by herself, a shorter girl with freckles and curly red hair. She was reading a book, her food barely touched. Charlotte wondered what book she was reading. *Maybe it was 'Harry Potter' or 'Lord of the Rings'! I love those books. If this girl was a fan of them, too, they could go see the new movie together and—*

Charlotte blinked and took a moment to compose herself. She had to remember to actually focus on the person and not think too far ahead. She walked up to the girl, who saw Charlotte's approach. "Hi! My name's Charlotte. Mind if I sit here?"

The girl gave a shy smile and nodded. "Yeah, sure. My name's Isabelle."

"It's nice to meet you, Isabelle," Charlotte said, sitting down. "I just saw you reading over here and figured we at least had that in common. I like to read, too. What book is it?"

Isabelle perked up. "It's called 'Anne of Green Gables'. It's pretty old, but it's a classic. I love it!" she said with a grin.

Charlotte looked at the book with interest. She had never heard of that book before, but she liked the title. "Oh, cool! I've never read it, but it sounds interesting."

"Oh, it's very good." Isabelle said, holding the book to her chest. "It's about an orphan named Anne who gets adopted, but the ones who adopted her actually wanted a boy. She gets all the way to Green Gables where they live and then..."

She was cut off by a voice nearby. "Charlottel Why don't you come and sit with us?" It was Rachel. She motioned over from the table she sat at with several other girls.

Charlotte blinked. She had said that she would talk with Rachel more, but she was really invested in Isabelle's explaining this new book. "Oh, no thanks; I'm busy right now," she said instinctively. Rachel scoffed and turned around, the other girls at the table doing the same.

Immediately, Charlotte's heart plummeted. Had she done something wrong again? *I did tell Rachel I would talk to her more. Was I rude? What if she got really offended, and I lose my second chance to be friends with her? What if other people start to think I'm rude? What if Rachel starts telling people I'm rude?*

She was lost in her own thoughts, until Isabelle cleared her throat. "Hey, are you okay?" she asked in concern.

Charlotte clenched her teeth. Not only had she been rude to Rachel, now she was ignoring Isabelle, too. She was too focused on her own thoughts... again. "I'm sorry, I... have to go."

Charlotte said, getting up and making her way out of the cafeteria. She went into the bathroom and stayed there until it was time to go to her next class.

*Why am I so bad at talking to people?* Charlotte thought. She had so much excitement and passion for everything, but when it came to making friends, she always felt like she had to tone it down or that she was too focused on herself.

Unsurprisingly, Charlotte had a hard time focusing during her next class. She tried doodling in her notebook so her focus would be on that and she could pay attention better to the lecture, but the teacher told her to pay attention.

Charlotte sighed and looked at the teacher while he talked, but her mind quickly began to wander without anything else to occupy it other than the lecture and her thoughts.

After class, Charlotte started making her way to her locker, intending to go home and sulk, when she was stopped by a familiar voice calling her name. Charlotte turned to see Isabelle approaching. She was surprised that Isabelle still wanted to talk to her after what happened earlier.

Isabelle actually had a smile on her face. She said, "Hey! Just wanted to make sure you're okay. I was worried you got sick or something."

Charlotte sighed, feeling guilty for worrying her, and then shook her head. "Oh, no, I'm fine. Thank you, though."

Isabelle nodded, and leaned up against the lockers. After a minute, she spoke again. "I also wanted to thank you for sitting with me, even after Rachel tried to get you to leave me." Charlotte blinked in confusion. "What do you mean?"

"Well, Rachel and I used to be friends, but we kind of had a falling out." Isabelle explained sadly. "She's pretty popular, and she's been making me feel isolated from her whole friend group since then, which is a pretty large one. She asked you to sit with them to get back at me. I thought for sure you would! After all, we barely know each other and I was just... talking about a book you've never heard of, but you stayed. And I appreciate that."

Charlotte's eyes were wide. She had made a good decision after all. Rachel was trying to get back at Isabelle, but Charlotte was so focused on what Isabelle was saying, she didn't even notice. "Oh... yeah! And actually, I was really interested in the book you were talking about. It sounds really cool, and I've been looking for something new to read."

Isabelle's face lit up even more. "Really? That's great! You can borrow it if you want. It's a great book. In fact, we could read it together if you want. I've been working on doing the voices and making it sound dramatic and exciting."

"You do that, too?" Charlotte said excitedly. "I do that with all my favorite books! Especially fantasy ones like *Lord of the Rings*."

"Oh! I've heard of that one, but I've never gotten around to reading it. What's it about?" Isabelle asked.

She could tell that this was the start of a great friendship, one where she could be excited and passionate. She would not feel out of place in the slightest.

