Charlie

SAMPLE

Prologue

Charlie, at only six years old, learned how to levitate water.

He remembered the moment like it was yesterday. He was sitting down in the grass outside their logged cabin that was tucked away and hidden in a large forest. The sun was at the highest point in the sky, not a cloud in sight. He could remember the warmth on his white skin, small droplets of the cold water he levitated from a bucket hitting his face.

“Charlie, how are you doing that?” His father Daniel asked, in shock.

His mother Mary was busy pulling weeds from their garden, not too far away from her son. She looked up to see what was going on, her eyes widening as Charlie giggled at them. The sunlight fractured through the floating water, shifting shadows of rainbows on Charlie’s face.

“You little munchkin. I was gonna use that water to wash the car,” Daniel teases, slowly walking up to his son.

He throws the towel he was holding onto the ground, kneeling. He stared up at the water, eyebrows furrowing. “How did you do this, son?”

“I don’t know! I wanted to play with the water!”

“Okay, sure,” Daniel muttered. “You wanted to play with the water, and… now you are.”

He glances at his wife, who had a big smile on her face. But she tilted her head, asking a question without needing to open her mouth.

“I thought you only could control temperature, Charlie?” Daniel asks, turning back to his son.

Charlie shrugs, not understanding the question.

“It just did it,” Charlie said.

Mary ran over to her family, rubbing off the dirt from her knees. “Daniel, I thought it was only—”

“I did too. I don't know how….” As his voice faltered, he scooted a bit closer to Charlie. “Make it a cube.”

Charlie brightened, ready to play the games they always did. After a few seconds of concentration, he willed the water to change shape. It slowly bent, twisting. Daniel and Mary looked more and more impressed as the water shaped itself into a perfect cube.

“Sphere,” Daniel commanded.

After a few seconds, a sphere was made.

“Cylinder.”

It successfully changed again.

“Pyramid.”

There was a pause. Charlie stared at the cylinder pillar of water above him, grunting uncomfortably. Seconds pass. The water quivered, more and more drops of water landing on Charlie’s face as he began to lose control of it.

“Papa,” Charlie said, getting frustrated.

Daniel lightly pushed his fingers through Charlie’s hair.

“Don't stress, do it slowly.”

The wait went on for the next couple of minutes. The water continued to struggle, losing more of it's shape. Charlie quickly gave up. The three watch as the water lost its shape completely, plopping loudly onto the floor.

There was silence. Tears filled Charlie's eyes. Before he could begin his tantrum, Daniel couldn't help but want to burst into song and dance.

"You can bend water!" He shouted, jumping to his feet. He happily picked Charlie up, his wife clapping along as they began to have their own little celebration. They twirled and danced, Charlie giggling with them, tantrum long gone.

"I have to tell Dad!" Daniel said, setting Charlie down and running back to the house.

After he disappeared inside, Charlie turned to look up at his mother. Mary looked back down at her son, kneeling and giving him a tight hug.

Her voice was a low whisper. "He knew you were going to be different. We all did."

Chapter 1

August 16th, 2017

Charlie sits on his cushioned windowsill, watching the stars from within his bedroom. Trying to make himself as small as possible, he brings his knees to his chest. He rubs aggressively at his eyelids, turning to look at his alarm clock for the hundredth time tonight.

The glowing red numbers read *2:00 AM*. Time's going too slow, he thinks.

Though, Charlie can't decide whether to be glad or not. He's too stressed to sleep. He's too afraid of what tomorrow will bring. His mind is filled with nothing, yet everything at the same time. Scenarios of what could happen filter through his brain like flash cards, each one more depressing and embarrassing than the last. It fills him with fear and unease. Tomorrow, he will experience something he never thought he would experience before.

He knows that staying up late will not help him escape tomorrow. *At least, that's what Mom always tells me.* But he'll try.

Charlie yawns again, jumping at the sound of someone knocking at his bedroom door.

He blinks as his father opens the door, keeping himself in the doorway. Charlie is about to apologize for keeping him up but notices he doesn't look tired at all.

"What are you doing up?" Daniel asks, walking into the room. He sits down in a free spot on the windowsill, the bedroom door shutting on its own. He looks out at the stars. "Is it school?" His pale blue eyes look back at his son.

Charlie doesn't answer.

“You know, when I first went to school, I felt the same way you're feeling right now.” Charlie gives his father a droll look with the same pale blue eyes, making Daniel chuckle. “I'm being serious. It was my number one fear. Teenagers.” He shivers in disgust.

Charlie laughs. “Do I scare you then?” He asks teasingly.

“Sometimes. You can get scary when you're hungry.” Charlie scoffs. Daniel ruffles his wild white hair. “You'll be fine, just be you. Whoever the first one is to come up to you, wanting to be your friend, you’ll know that's the one.”

“A person won't just walk up to me and say they want to be my friend. That's weird.”

“Mm, I don't know. This world is full of surprises. It's filled with so many people, you never know.”

“If doesn’t happen, how will I know?”

“They won't judge you for the way you look, but the type of person you are,” Daniel responds, smiling. “They'll challenge the way you think, and they'll help you belong.” He pauses. “You know, you’ll be enrolling as a sophomore tomorrow. You’ll be going to school for the first time in your life with other people. No more cabin haven. No more privacy. The right person will know you aren’t feeling like yourself, and they’ll want to help. You can tell when they’re being genuine as well, use your abilities to your advantage.”

Charlie remembers what his mother said a week before when they opened the door to their new house in the middle of a tiny town.

“One step at a time, Charlie. Tiny steps.”

“You know,” Daniel starts, leaning in, “the best thing that can come from such a huge change, is the memories that come with it. Hm?” Charlie nods. “I don’t want you to be upset. I want you to be excited. I moved you and your mother here to keep your old memories, but also, make new ones. Experience things a normal kid would.” Daniel pulls his knees to his chest too. “That’s something I kind of regret, you know. You didn’t grow up with any friends except for your cousins, and your mom dad.”

“And I was fine with that.”

“And while that makes me happy, you have to grow up someday. Learn to socialize with people you don’t know. Experience unease, anxiety, excitement, and love. Especially love.”

“You make it sound like I’m going to find someone like *that*.” Daniel raises an eyebrow, and at that point, Charlie knew he made an embarrassing mistake. “Not that I’m looking for one! Don't get any ideas!”

“Ideas?” asks Daniel, smirking evilly. “Whatever do you mean? You know, now that we’re talking about it, what’s your type? Got a face on your mind already?”

Charlie blushes.

“No!”

Daniel laughs, shushing him at the same time.

“Your mother’s sleeping, don't wake her.” Daniel sobers. “I'm not kidding Charlie, don't let anyone talk down to you about who you are. People can be very close-minded and judgmental. Society has made norms for us to follow, and I’m counting on you not to follow them.”

“So, basically, you want me to stick out like a sore thumb?” Charlie asks.

“Not exactly. I just want you to be different than the others. I want you to teach people a lesson. Be somebody.”

“Oh, trust me. I think I’m pretty different.” Charlie looks over at his dresser, where a picture of the forest levitates into the air, twirling slowly.

Daniel turns to look at the flying picture, raising a hand. He snaps his finger, the picture frame landing hard, falling on its front.

“Charlie, you have to promise me that you won't use your abilities outside of home. Do you understand?”

“But you said—”

“I know what I said. And I think what we can do is amazing and should be shared with the world. Just not yet. People aren't ready. You are a person with or without your abilities. Your abilities do not define you. They do not define us.”

Charlie slouches, his anxiety only growing. *Be myself but not too much. Sure. I can do that.*

“Yeah okay,” Charlie mumbles.

“Come on, you need to get to bed,” says Daniel, standing. He throws his arms around his son’s waist, lifting him up with ease.

Charlie shouts with surprise, laughing as he is tipped upside down. His father carries him by the legs as he walks to Charlie’s bed. “Papa, put me down!” Daniel twirls around.

“You need to loosen up a bit kiddo, it's your first day living life tomorrow! I won't have you moping around!”

He swings Charlie onto the bed, poking him rapidly on the stomach. After ceasing his attack, Daniel shoves his son towards his pillow. An invisible force wraps the blankets over him, Daniel tucking him in tightly. He plants butterfly kisses all over Charlie’s face until he’s left a giggling mess.

“Go to sleep!” Daniel says, giving his son one last kiss on the cheek. He turns and walks back to the bedroom door.

He looks back at the dresser, as well as the fallen picture. He twirls a hand, magically setting the picture upright. He gives Charlie a small wink, the door closing behind him.

The alarm screeches a second after Charlie opens his eyes. The sun shines through the window, making his room a lot warmer than it was last night. He groans, turning over and facing his yelling alarm clock, making it shut up with a twitch of his eye.

He closes his eyes again, prepared to pass out a second time, only for his bedroom door to open without a knock. He looks up, ready to yell at his father, only for it to be his mother instead.

All the cuss words leave his lips.

“Good morning, love,” Mary says.

“Morning,” Charlie responds, stretching.

“Your dad is making breakfast downstairs. Let's hurry it up, okay? I want to take you to school.”

Charlie nods. Mary quietly leaves.

Charlie enters the kitchen. His nerves calm a little at the smell of breakfast and seeing his dad calmly drinking coffee at the kitchen table.

“Hey sleepyhead, how are you? Feeling good?” Daniel asks.

“Nervous,” Charlie responds, taking a seat. “What are you making?”

“Pancakes.” He nods over to the stove.

Over the oven, pancakes are flipping themselves on pans, bacon sizzling. On the counter, orange juice levitates over to fill three cups. One cup floats over to land on Charlie’s placemat.

Mary enters the kitchen, dressed in business casual for her new accounting job, with her brown curly hair pulled in a ponytail.

“Charlie, I forgot to tell you that some of our neighbors will be coming over to eat dinner with us tonight.”

“Tonight?” Charlie asks.

“It'll be nice to have some friends in the neighborhood that go to the same school as you, huh?” She slaps Daniel’s shoulders, making him flinch and pretend to be hurt.

“Oww—”

“Plate the pancakes yourself, Daniel,” she scolds. She walks around the table to give her son a firm kiss on the forehead. “You have ten minutes to eat. I want you to be down here by 8:30, yeah?”

After getting an affirmative, she leaves the room to look for her keys she always tends to lose.

Daniel gets up, opening cabinets to grab a couple of plates.

“Our neighbors go to my school?” Charlie asks.

“Yeah, Redwood High is five minutes away from here by car. This neighborhood should be crowded with kids.”

Charlie swallows. The nerves that were slowly going away, are now coming back. Charlie has never had a conversation with someone other than his family members before. His social skills are not up to date, and he’s worried he’ll embarrass himself…. *Well, I will embarrass myself. There’s no escaping it.*

“Stop worrying, Charlie,” Daniel says, setting the pancakes in front of him. “Just think good and clear thoughts. Focus on just… being normal. But not *too* normal.”

“Thanks for the awesome and well-thought-out advice.”

Daniel presses a kiss on Charlie’s forehead.

“You’re welcome. I’ll be here all week.”

Once Charlie finishes up his breakfast, he makes the plates levitate into the sink. Daniel clicks his tongue with fake disappointment. “Lazy!” He shouts as Charlie leaves the kitchen.

"Takes one to know one!"

Daniel gasps loudly in fake offense.

Who knows how much time has passed since he left the kitchen. Charlie sure doesn't know. He's been staring at his closet for ages now, not knowing what to wear. *This is only one of the many obstacles I'll be facing today, and for the rest of the year.*

Charlie's a bookworm, and he's read plenty of stories talking about fashion and the woes of high school. He understands that this decision he makes today, what he'll put on his body, may very well change the course of his entire high school career. *Pick something awful, and I'll be bullied for months. Pick something great, and I might get bullied anyways.*

How… ridiculous. Screw it.

He grabs a random t-shirt with jeans and tennis shoes.

He then faces his next challenge. His hair.

He stares at himself in the mirror, finally coming to terms that clothing doesn't matter when he looks the way he does.

He came out of the womb as a carbon copy of his father. With the entirety of his father's side of the family carrying the albinism gene, there was little hope that Charlie wouldn't inherit it.

There's nothing to be ashamed of. There are plenty of people with albinism.

He never thought about it before. He never had this moment where he was afraid of the consequences his own skin would bring him. He's not insecure, per say. But he's nervous. He's just nervous. He loves his family, loves how different he is, but he's nervous. There's no other word to explain it.

After successfully calming his fragile hair down, he grabs a backpack and meets with his mother downstairs. *Whatever happens, happens.*

"Right on time, good job," Mary says. "And you're matching for once in your life."

Charlie sticks his tongue out at her.

Mary takes her son's shoulders as they walk towards the front door.

"Bye papa!" Charlie calls.

"Have a good day, tell me all about it when you get back! No abilities!"

"Yeah, yeah!" Charlie opens the front door, his mother following him out into the cool fall morning.

The car is parked in the driveway, both of them hopping in.

"Alright, big day," Mary says as she drives down the neighborhood. When Charlie doesn't respond, Mary gives him a love tap on the shoulder. "Stop thinking."

"Huh?"

"Flowers."

"What?"

"Hotdogs!"

“Mom?”

“Poodles.”

“Mom, what are you doing?” Charlie asks, laughing.

“Making you smile! You're nervous for nothing! I know things will go right!”

“And how do you know?”

“Because. I have a *mother’s sixth sense*. Just be you, it doesn't matter what other people say. You might hear someone talking about you at least once today, but that's just life, darling. The comments aren't always bad.” She pauses. “And I’m sorry I kept you away from it for so long.”

“*Mom*—”

“No, no. This is my fault. I shouldn't have kept you away from everything. I should've at least made an effort to take you to the grocery store with me. I should've helped you with your social skills. It's like throwing a tiny newborn puppy in the middle of the dog park. You have no experience.”

“I'll learn. I'll try my best. It shouldn't be that hard, right?”

Why am I trying to comfort her now?

Mary parks in the high school parking lot, setting her hand on Charlie’s cheek.

“It shouldn’t. You'll be fine,” she says, unlocking the doors. “Go to the office first to get your schedule. You have your lunch money, right? Pencils? Notebooks? Books in general—?”

“Yes, mom, I have everything. Now you're the one worrying,” Charlie teases, opening the door.

“My baby is taking a huge step out of nowhere! I am worried!”

“Bye mom, I’ll see you later.”

“Be good. No abilities.”

“No abilities. Got it. Bye.”

He shuts the door, turning to look up at the large school that already has students entering.

He takes a breath, walking across the parking lot.