

From Bully to Buddy *Prologue*

It used to be that whenever the bell rang, everyone would scurry off to class, except Riley. When the bell rang, she would stomp through the hallways pushing aside everyone in her way. I would jump off to class with everyone else. That's what I always did, until the time I didn't.

* * *

Alexis was eating a hamburger. Katy was chomping on a sandwich. Sam sat, gobbling down tuna. We were laughing and talking in the cafeteria. The blue walls appeared to be even more dull somehow, and the yellow tables were rickety and old.

"Hey, Kayla," Alexis said to me. "Do you want to walk home together after school?"

"Sure," I replied. "I just have viol-" But I was interrupted.

Suddenly, a high-heeled shoe struck the floor. As if on cue, everyone stopped talking and cleared a path. It was as if all the laughter was being sucked out of the room.

"*She's here,*" someone whispered in terror. "Riley has arrived."

Riley eyed the tables one at a time. Looking as if to see *who should I make get up*, she turned her head from left to right, up and down. Her eyes narrowed into slits as she landed on... the table we were sitting at.

"Get up," Riley instructed me. "Go on now," she told me when I didn't budge. "I said, get up! I don't have all day." To my surprise, I didn't move a muscle.

Riley raised an eyebrow at me.

"Get up or else," she threatened, raising her bejeweled fist.

"Just because you're parading around with attitude doesn't mean you have the right to make me get up," I muttered under my breath.

"What

Was

That?" Riley questioned, smiling a cruel smile.

"She told you that you should give her some space!" Katy spat.

"Leave my friend alone!" Sam yelled.

"Stop bossing Kayla around!" Max said in a stern voice gritting his teeth.

"I said," now more confident, "that you're not a dictator and *not* the boss just because you think you are! I am not getting up, so if you would excuse me, I would like to go back to talking to my *friends*."

That was what made her do it. Riley completely lost it. Apparently, she didn't like being called the boss. Riley lashed out at me, and before I knew what had happened, I was in the nurse's office with a big black and blue bruise on my hip.

* * *

“What happened?” I asked groggily as I sat up.

“Riley shoved you pretty hard,” Nurse Mosley told me. “You’ll be okay though. But Riley is having a severe talking to by Principal Maxwell.”

“*Principal Maxwell?*” I asked. I wanted Riley to get in trouble but not by *her*.

“She will lay down the law. No need to worry. Get some sleep and you should be fine in an hour,” assured Nurse Mosley.

“Leo, another student is here to see you,” a teacher called.

“Looks like I have to get going then.” He smiled. *Be back soon*, I thought silently.

* * *

I walked into the room as Alexis and Max were talking.

“Hey guys,” I groaned.

“Kayla!” Katy said, absent-mindedly twirling her brown hair around her finger. “How are you? Riley pushed you pretty hard. Is there anything I can do? We told the Principal.”

“Katy, don’t ask so many things at once. The answers are: Good, not really, and the Principal?”

“I... don’t follow,” Katy said, puzzled. I shrugged. I didn’t have time to explain. *Ring! Ring!* The bell sounded.

“I’ll see you tomorrow!” I called over my shoulder as I ran off to catch the bus.

* * *

“Hello,” the speaker blared the next morning. “Good morning Berkshire High,” it sounded. “Riley Carpenter and Kayla Wendel, please report to Principal Maxwell’s office!” I shot a worried glance at my friends before disappearing into the crowd.

“Miss Carpenter has something to tell you,” Principal Maxwell said.

Riley started, “I... m... I’m...I’m....” Then, the most unexpected thing occurred. She burst into tears.

Riley actually cried! Suddenly, I felt bad. *But why?* I asked myself. *What did I do?*

“I d...don’t appreciate your insulting me,” Riley finally confided. “I asked you to get up and, you shouted at me!” She whimpered quietly. “So did all of your friends,” Riley sulked.

With that Riley dried her tears and walked out the door. As Riley exited the room, she started to whimper again. I know because I followed her.

“What did I do to deserve this? Did I do this to myself?” Riley asked herself quietly. Then she continued to cry.

So? What happened? My friends wanted to know.

“Riley, confessed,” I said, puzzled. “She, she told me her actual *feelings*.”

“Her feelings?” Max questioned. “Are we talking about the same Riley?”

“Yes,” I tried to tell them. “But... no.”

“Hmm?” Alexis asked.

“She was different...almost delicate,” I said.

“Do you think we did something?” I wanted to know.

“No,” Max said.

“Yeah, all we did was tell her to back off,” Katy said.

“Wait, oh no...” I worried.

“What?” Katy said.

“How many of us told her stop bossing people around?”

“Um... three of us, four including you,” Max said. “Why?”

“Because,” I explained, “when we were talking, Riley told me that she was upset that you guys yelled at her. She was upset that you defended me.”

“Oh...” Alexis said, putting the pieces together. “If Riley had been in our situation, who would stand up

for her?”

“No one,” Max realized.

“She doesn’t really have friends,” Katy completed.

“Maybe... is Riley jealous?”

“If she is, Riley can make her own friends,” Max said.

That night, I couldn’t sleep. *She can just make her own friends*, Max had said. But who would want to be her friend? *No one*, I realized. Of all the people at Berkshire High, the only ones who might be willing to befriend Riley were... us.

“Guys,” I told my friends the next morning. “I think we need to become friends with Riley.”

“What?” Sam asked. “No.”

“I thought the same thing. But the more I thought about it, yes,” I assured him. “Who else will do it?”

“No one.”

“She’s nice. Riley’s just hidden. She’s not such a bad person. Riley is just broken,” I told them.

“You’re right,” Alexis remarked.

“We have to try to befriend her,” I sighed. “Tomorrow.”

At lunch, Riley was sitting all alone. As if with practiced choreography, we all moved our trays from our table to hers.

“Hi,” Sam said to her, smiling. “Can we sit here too?”

Riley scoffed. “You, here? No.” She pushed her tray to the next table over and continued eating her turkey sandwich on rye.

I shrugged. *What else can I do?* I thought to myself. *I tried*. I almost wanted to say, *looks like we can’t befriend Riley*. But there was a bigger question: *Why doesn’t Riley want to be our friend?*

As if echoing my thoughts, Sam whispered, “why wouldn’t Riley want to be our friend?”

“Well, I guess we did all gang up on her.”

“Wait,” I said impatiently to my friends. “What if Riley wants friends... but not us?”

“But why would Riley not want *us* to become her friends?”

“Well,” Katy thought. “She did shove Kayla. Maybe she doesn’t like us?”

Riley did push me, I thought. But, Sam, Katy, and Max talked back to her in a really stern tone. Maybe Riley feels like she was yelled at, because she had never been yelled at before.

“Hey, Sam, Katy, Max! Why did you feel the need to shout at Riley? I think that’s what hurt her feelings and made her so sensitive.”

“Because, Kayla,” Sam started, “you’re our friend.”

“We care about you. When we saw Riley hurting you, we wanted to help,” Alexis added, smiling.

That night, I scarfed down my dinner and ran to my room. I carefully pulled my journal from its hiding place in my sock drawer and began writing:

Dear Diary,

Riley is so mean to me. She pushed me a couple of days ago and barely stuttered an apology. So, I ask you, why do I want to become her friend? I think it’s because under all those layers, she seems like a nice person. The layers just need to be removed in order to let her shine. I think she is jealous of our friendship, Does Riley have any friends? I don’t think that she does. How do I convince her that becoming my friend will be good for her?

I closed my journal and returned it to the sock drawer, then flopped into bed. Before I knew it, I was sound asleep.

“Excuse me, is Riley home?” Alexis asked politely as Mrs. Carpenter opened the door the next morning.

It had been decided that Alexis and I would go to Riley’s house to talk with her. Alexis is really good with adults, and Riley was most likely to recognize me. I could see Riley through the crack of the door. We locked eyes. She was sulking on the bottom step of the stairs, so it surprised me when Riley violently shook her head at her mother as if saying, *don’t let them in!*

“No,” Mrs. Carpenter reported with sympathy. “Riley is not home right now.” Biting her lip, Mrs.

Carpenter closed the door on us.

“What happened?” Sam asked later.

“Surprisingly,” I said, “Riley did not want to chat.”

“Well,” Max replied, “I guess we’ll have to try again tomorrow.”

“Except this time,” I thought, “Katy and Max should have to visit the Carpenter home.”

The next day, we had no luck. We continued to go to Riley’s house every morning with no success. Every day, a pair of us headed to the brightly colored house to invite Riley to walk to Berkshire High. Every day, Riley said no.

“Riley,” I asked the next day, “Could we walk to biology class with you?” Riley muttered something about the bathroom and slipped down the hall and into the crowd.

“Maybe we need to try something new,” I told my friends. “What if we write her an apology note?”

“But that wouldn’t be fair!” Sam argued. “She is the one who was being a bully so why should we have to apologize?”

“I propose,” Katy began, “to write an apology note to Riley.” She stopped when Sam groaned. “But, we should also explain our point of view to her...that way she understands *why* we said those things.”

It was decided. Tomorrow, the note would be delivered.

Sam and I trudged through the heavy snow and clutched the letter in our hands. 1804 Berkely Ave. *This is it*, I thought. Sam gently crept onto the snow-covered lawn and dropped the envelope into the mailbox. He gave me a thumbs up and ducked out of the yard.

* * *

“How did it go?” Katy asked as Sam and I entered the building.

Sam stroked his blond hair before saying, “I dropped the note off.” He shrugged. “What else is there to it?” Everyone laughed.

After class, my friends and I were talking about the best way to blow a bubble with gum. We were walking in the hallway when we got cornered by none other than Riley.

“Hey...” she whispered softly. “I got your note and realized that I was being really mean. At first, I wanted to ignore the note. But I realized that I couldn’t. You were right. I guess... I was just jealous of your friendship. I’m so sorry.”

“It’s ok. You just have to think about everyone around you. They have feelings too. If you hurt them, it will leave an emotional scar. We all need to try to be kind to everyone. But everyone deserves a second chance.”

With that, the new group of friends smiled as they walked together... to lunch.

The End!