

Chapter One

Archie is the G.T.S.O.A.T, Greatest Toilet Scrubber of All Time

Archie awoke with a snort, his alarm must've been blaring for almost an hour. He rubbed his eyes, willing them to focus on the time on the clock.

9:00 AM.

Archie would've panicked if not for remembering that it was in fact Saturday. He rolled out of bed, kicking a pair of dirty pants from beneath his feet. He stretched out the knots from his back and turned off his alarm. For a second, he'd forgotten where he was.

Even after three months of living in England, he still wasn't used to it. One too many truancies, failed tests, and calls home. His dad shipped him off to some fancy boarding school in England. Listen, Archie wasn't a bad kid by any means, he was just going through a lot.

"It'll be good for you." His dad swore. But then again, it was his alma mater, so he was a little biased.

Archie picked up his phone from his nightstand, he had a missed call from his grandpa and a text from his grandma; *'Settling in alright? Miss you!'* Archie's grandparents had funded this whole thing, and they were ecstatic that Archie would live nearer to them. Archie dreaded it, he didn't fit in with his dad's side of the family. They were all people with an eye for business. Either they worked in finance, banking, or owned their own companies. In other words, they were LOADED. Family reunions always sucked.

"So what do you want to do when you grow up?" Aunt Hilde always asked, sipping on a glass of wine. Maybe that's why no matter how many times he'd answered, she always asked again.

"I wanna be a drummer." He'd mutter, almost shamefully, as if he'd wanted no one to hear.

"Oh dearie, that's not an actual career! Music is a hobby, what about a proper job?"

Even being at Wardsworth he hated it. He wasn't a rich kid back in California, he went to a normal high school, with normal classes and normal friends. Now he went to a rich kid boarding school where he did not fit in. Besides, he had a life in California. He and his friends had started a band and were working on their first album. Finally, a lifelong dream of his was inches away from completion and his dad shipped him off before he could finish it.

But it didn't matter now. His grandparents paid the tuition in full and he was no longer an American high school student, he now was a student at Wardsworth School.

The thing about Wardsworth is that any American teen would think it was a college campus based on its size alone. In fact, on the first day he'd got there he had to double-check with his grandpa that they were at the right place. The Wardsworth campus was made of four major buildings; First, the dorm halls that were four stories tall and could house around four hundred students at full capacity. Archie was surprised to learn that they supported co-ed rooming in dorms to "cultivate trust" among students.

The other two buildings were academic buildings, one housing the library and dining hall on its first floor and the other an indoor gym. The architecture of Wardsworth was also more akin to a university than a high school.

Everyone was so serious, from the students to the teachers. Even the extracurricular activities. Archie had wanted to be a part of the music program. But they only had auditions for their orchestra class, which was not his style. Still, his dad signed him up.

Archie had worked extra hard on his audition, playing one of his strongest pieces on the drums. Sure, it was a rock piece but if he had enough skill to start a band back home surely the Wardsworth orchestra would take him too. The band instructor was one of the most laid back professors there. He even insisted students call him by his first name. Music was the one thing Archie had been consistently good at the last few years. It was his biggest strength.

Still, Archie wasn't surprised when he didn't make the class.

"You aren't quite suited for orchestra." James, the band director, had told him the day after the audition results had been posted. "It's not to say you aren't talented, don't get me wrong. But your musical strengths lie in other places."

The pounding noise he'd thought was coming from the alarm continued, bringing him back into reality. He stared at the door hearing a familiar voice outside.

"Archie get up!" Marley yelled from outside the door.

Marley and Archie had only become real friends in the past few weeks. They only had one class together, their Physics class. They were lab partners, much to Marley's chagrin at first. For the first week of classes, she called him "surfer boy" because he came from California and had blonde hair. Slowly they became real friends and Marley referred to him by name (well except if he did something dumb then she'd call him a "*mentecato*.")

Marley was pretty much the only non-pretentious rich kid at Wardsworth. She was at Wardsworth on an athletic scholarship. When Archie asked her about her family she'd always say;

"They don't matter. I'm not here because of their money"

So suffice to say that after a while Archie stopped asking.

“What?” He yawned, opening the door. Marley’s face dropped immediately upon seeing the state of his room.

“Ay, *dios mío*...your room’s a disaster.” She shook her head, a few strands of dark hair falling in front of her face.

“Yeah? So what?”

Archie’s room *was* a disaster. He happened to get lucky, and ended up with a dorm room all to himself after his roommate never showed. At first, this was a blessing, he plastered all the walls with band posters within seconds of moving in. But, without a roommate or adult constantly reminding him to pick up, Archie always forgot.

Dirty laundry and empty snack wrappers littered the floor. His bed was all out of order, with the sheets falling off the corners. Not to mention all of his late school work was a mess on his desk. Archie didn’t see a problem with it, it was his own space after all. If he had a roommate he’d have been more respectful to it. But he liked living in his own chaos, it made things a little more normal.

“It’s amazing how you seem to forget every time.” Marley rolled her eyes, shoving a trash bag into Archie’s hands.

The realization hit Archie like a truck. That’s why his alarm went off on a Saturday. It was inspection day, as it always was on Saturdays. The floor’s RAs would check one by one each room for contraband and cleanliness. Which was another school motto ‘A clean space makes for a good student!’

The only ways to not pass inspection were being found with contraband or being found with a room that looked like a tornado had blown through it. Archie was now facing the latter. Typically Archie didn’t care about failing the inspection but if he failed it this time it wouldn’t

mean scrubbing the dorm toilets for a week (which he considered himself pretty darn good at.) This time it meant that he couldn't go on the trip into London tomorrow.

He'd been looking forward to it all month. Last time they'd gone, he and Marley found a small record store that also carried sheet music. He'd begged his dad to send him some more allowance to spend there and now he'd finally gotten it. There were a few records he'd had his eye on and he wasn't going to risk waiting another month to snag them. He *needed* to be on that trip tomorrow.

"¡Venga!" Marley pushed past Archie and began shoveling trash into her trash bag. It took a moment before Archie jumped into action. He grabbed his laundry basket and began to fill it with all the loose dirty laundry. The two only had around twenty minutes before the RA would reach Archie's room. There was a lot still to do.

Around ten minutes before the RA was supposed to reach Archie's room they were a little more than halfway done. Archie had tried to make his dirty laundry neat, and Marley was already filling a second trash bag.

"Archie...it's only been a week, how many snacks can you eat?" She asked, pulling out a pile of wrappers from beneath his bed.

"Well, uh, that isn't just from last week."

Marley turned, raising an eyebrow at him before shaking her head and going back to cleaning.

"It's like you don't even care, don't you know it's a privilege to be here?"

"God," he groaned, rolling his eyes. "You sound like my grandma. You know I didn't ask to be here."

"I know I know," She stuffed the rest of the trash into her bag. "Your dad is making you go here so he can make you-"

"-just like him." They said in unison. Archie moved to his desk, cringing at the late assignments before cleaning them up.

"You should care more about your education." Marley hefted both the filled trash bags over her shoulder. Archie was shoving his schoolwork into the desk drawer.

"It doesn't really matter, I'll get expelled for bad grades or bad behavior then I can go back to *my* school in Cali with my friends."

"I don't think your grandparents would much appreciate that, or your dad."

Archie shook his head, shoving the stuffed drawer closed. "What do I care what he thinks?"

Marley sighed, heading to the door. "I'm taking these out, when I get back your bed better be made."

"Okay, *grandma*." Archie rolled his eyes.

Marley left, closing the door behind her. Archie could hear the RA down the hall, it wouldn't be long before his room would be inspected. He stowed his laundry basket beneath his bed, and then made it. As he tucked his blankets in he felt something beneath his pillows. His drumsticks. He pulled them out from under his pillow. The wood splintered at the ends where the sticks hit the rim of the drums and the paint designs that once decorated the handles faded beyond recognition. He twirled one in his hand and tucked them into his nightstand drawer.

They were his first and only pair of drumsticks. His mom had given them to him five years ago on his tenth birthday, he still remembered it like it was yesterday.

“How about that one Archie?” She pointed to a long, thin, wrapped box on the table. Archie unwrapped the box and he found a long velvet drawstring bag. Inside was a brand-new pair of drumsticks. He looked back and forth between the drumsticks to her as if to say ‘*Is this real?*’

His mom smiled back, the warm smile he’d remembered her having even up until the day she died. She tilted her head toward the garage and Archie booked it.

Inside the garage was a shiny new drum set, black and decorated with fire decals. He remembered looking back at his mom adjusting the bandana that she often wore around her now bald head.

“It’s all yours, baby, I know how much you wanted it.”

Archie spent the whole night trying to learn *Another One Bites The Dust* on his new drum set. But, his mom never got to hear it perfected.

He couldn’t live in the memory too long, even though it’d been almost five years since his mom passed it never got easier. And now he lived halfway across the world from where he last saw her, it’s like his dad was trying to make him forget her.

In better news, his room looked nice, but the smell was a little obscene. He opened his window hoping that he could air it out enough in the next five minutes. There was a knock on his door.

When he opened the door the last person he was expecting to see was Mr. Davis— James, the band director.

The band director at Wardsworth didn't match the rest of the school at all. He was a younger guy, in his late twenties or early thirties. He had some piercings left in, the ones on the top of your ears that you can't take out. His hair was shaggier and longer, falling below his chin.

He wore wireframe glasses that looked like they came straight from the 70s. He wore a light blue polo with the logo of the school embroidered on the left chest area and a nice pair of jeans.

“Oh—uh, hi?” Archie stammered, glancing down the hall for any sign of Marley.

“Been doing some last-minute cleaning huh?” James leaned forward, peeking into his room. Archie glanced over, spotting a pair of pants peeking out from beneath his bed.

“Yeah,” Archie chuckled, rubbing the back of his neck. “Did you need something?”

“Yes! I wanted to talk to you about an exciting new opportunity.”

Archie’s heart sank, this was the last thing he needed, another teacher telling him how he could improve, offering tutoring, etc. He shook his head.

“No, you know, I’m pretty busy—”

“You didn’t even let me explain Archie.” James laughed. “Just give me a shot here kiddo.”

“Okay, okay.”

James pulled out a flier from his messenger bag.

“I can’t convince the school to let me run a jazz band or anything, something that you would thrive in. But I found a guy in town who runs a music shop. He’s willing to host once a week if I can get a band together.”

The flier read, *The Daveys*, in big bold letters then beneath, *a Jazz and Rock band for aspiring musicians in the area—positions available; Bassist, Guitarist, Keyboard Artist, Vocalist.*

First meeting; November 9, 6:00pm. That was tonight.

“It doesn’t say drummer on here.”

“An astute observation! That’s because I’ve already found one.” James raised his brows at him but Archie still wasn’t getting it. Archie rolled his eyes.

“Well thanks, but I don’t play anything but the drums. And trust me I’ve tried. You do not wanna hear my guitar skills, and I swear my singing would cause an avalanche.”

“No—uh—” James quickly backtracked. He rubbed his brow, “I should’ve been more direct. I want you to be the drummer in the band.”

“You do?”

“Yeah of course. Kiddo, you have massive talent on the drums, and sharp reflexes too. You mentioned you were in a band back in California right?”

Archie nodded.

“You have more experience and I can tell you’ve got passion, even if that doesn’t reflect in your grades.”

“Thanks?”

“Just, think about it, the first meeting is tonight and I have a few other kids who RSVP'd. Maybe you could even make some new friends too.”

“Yeah, I’ll think about it.” Archie folded the flier and shoved it in his pajama pants pocket.

“Hope I see you there.” James left, Archie closed the door and changed into his real clothes. He only had a handful of clean clothes left in his closet, but it was enough for today and tomorrow, then he would *definitely* do his laundry. He put on a *Cage the Elephant* t-shirt which he’d gotten two years ago when he saw them live in LA. He’d gone to that concert with Sammie, his old ‘best friend.’

Sammie was Archie’s closest friend back in California. They were also the coolest person Archie knew. Sammie constantly dyed their hair bright purple and wore a denim vest decked out with all types of pins and patches. This, worn over a band t-shirt or tank top with cargo pants and

combat boots. They were also the guitarist in Archie's band and were honestly the reason he got into music. Sammie took him record shopping for the first time. Archie vividly remembered the last time Sammie had convinced him to sneak out.



"Hurry up!" Sammie yelled back to Archie. Archie was lagging behind, mostly because he'd only woken up thirty minutes ago. So he was still a little discombobulated. He'd awoken to Sammie knocking on his window. Which scared him mostly since he was on the second floor of his house, but apparently Sammie had a penchant for climbing trees.

Archie had no clue where Sammie was taking him, they'd only said it was pretty cool and only accessible in the middle of the night.

Sammie led him through the city and out to an abandoned concrete warehouse overlooking the beach. It was one of those big warehouses that looked like a giant concrete box with windows scattered about the walls. Sammie quickly began climbing a rusty ladder on the side of the building that must've been a service entrance to the roof. Archie hesitated but Sammie held out their hand and his anxiety melted away. They climbed the ladder together and on top of the roof Sammie had set up a mini picnic.

There was a blanket laid out with a basket full of all of Archie's comfort snacks like Doritos and Takis. Lighting the space was a battery-operated lantern that was made to look like an old oil lantern. The view was perfect too, it was calming. Sammie wrung their hands nervously.

"Pretty cool huh?" They smiled.

"Yeah..." Sammie took his hand and they sat down. The two sat in silence for a while, Archie leaned back, relaxing. He took in all of his senses, the cool breeze, the smell of the sea,

and the sound of the waves lulling back and forth. It was almost enough to put Archie back to sleep. But Sammie's fidgeting kept him alert.

"Is everything—"

"So there was a reason why I...I wanted to tell you something," Sammie spoke so quickly that it took a moment for Archie to process what they were saying. When he did, his face got warm. He looked away, trying to hide how much he was blushing.

"We've been friends for a while, and I'd totally understand if you want it to stay that way but...uhm..." Sammie pushed up their glasses, trying to get the words out, and for once in his life Archie wasn't oblivious.

Archie took Sammie's free hand, rubbing his thumb on the palm of their hand. He smiled and nodded, and Sammie seemed to also understand. Sammie rested their head on Archie's shoulder and they sat on the roof till sunrise.

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Of course, the summer Archie got a significant other was the one his dad decided to send him away. It was just his luck. After that night on the rooftop, they made it official, they were dating.

"Oi!" Marley's voice snapped him out of the memory. "Earth to Archie!"

He looked over to her, "Oh, sorry."

"Put on your shirt, the RA is a door down."

Archie blushed in embarrassment, quickly putting his shirt on and throwing on his denim jacket.

"Well," Marley sighed, looking around the room. "Not perfect of course." She pushed the basket of laundry further under the bed and out of sight. "But hopefully enough."

“I’m praying.” Archie chuckled, rubbing the back of his neck.

“I have to get back to my dorm, let me know what happens.”

“Will do...”

Marley left his dorm, disappearing again down the hallway. Archie leaned out of his door as the RA exited the room next to his. He held his breath.