

NOVELLA BY



NURTURING POTENTIAL



Dedicated to Sophia

*who inspires everyone she meets with her strength, kindness,
and passion for teaching.*

Chapter 1

"What do you wanna be when you're older Sophia?"

Sophia peered up at her brother with a questioning glance. He was sitting next to her on their dining table, waiting with his arms crossed, boredom etched into his face as she studied his homework, deciding how best to teach it. The sudden query took her by surprise. Her younger brother was never the type to care much about this, always preferring to play and mess around instead.

She smiled down at the book as she answered, the thought clear and bright in her mind.

"I'm gonna be a teacher!!"

Her brother watched silently at how bright she shone as she said those words. Then he rolled his eyes in the most brotherly way and added, "Of course" with a sigh.

"Alright, now, let's make this boring homework into a fun adventure!" she said, trying to figure out the trick to his potential. Her brother was incredibly smart, she just knew it. She saw it every day in the way he played and the way he acted.

"An adventure?" He seemed cautiously interested in the idea so she pushed it a little more.

"Right! Let's make it this fun game instead. So the way it works is..."

Sophia sighed as she cast her mind back to that moment. When she finally worked out that her brother learnt best when he was entertained by the study, she spent almost every evening helping him with his homework in the same way. When his grades finally soared to new heights, a special feeling blossomed in her heart. Pride. She knew she only played a little part in nudging him in the right direction. It was up to him to find his way to the end, and he did. But unlocking that potential itself filled her with pride.

And she spent every day since then chasing that special feeling. Only it was proving a lot harder than she had expected.

Sophia glanced around her tiny university dorm room, the soft hum of her desk lamp illuminating the piles of textbooks and handwritten notes scattered across her desk. It had been almost two years since she'd left home, but the ache of homesickness still lingered in quiet moments like this.

Moving away had been necessary—there were no real opportunities back in her small town, no programs that could have helped her chase her dream of becoming a teacher. She had to make the leap, pack her life into two suitcases, and wave goodbye to the house she'd grown up in, her parents' warm smiles, and her brother's teasing antics.

She missed them more than she ever thought possible. The first few weeks had been the hardest. She'd grown so accustomed to hearing her brother's laughter echoing through the house or smelling her mom's cooking wafting from the kitchen. Her dad's comforting presence, even in his silence, had always been a grounding force. Now, the absence of those familiar sounds and scents left her dorm feeling colder, emptier.

Sophia had tried her best to adapt. She threw herself into her studies, finding solace in the certainty of structured lectures and assignments. But there were nights when the homesickness would hit her like a wave, leaving her curled up on her bed with her phone in hand, scrolling through old family photos.

Her brother had surprised her during one of those particularly lonely nights. He'd called her, unprompted, just to complain about his own homework.

"You know, it's way harder without you to do my homework for me," he'd grumbled, his voice full of mock annoyance. But Sophia could hear the underlying message clearly—he missed her too.

"Just say you miss playing games with me," she teased, a smile tugging at her lips despite the tears threatening to fall.

Now, as she stared at the small cork board above her desk—covered with pinned-up memories of home and little notes of encouragement her mom had snuck into her suitcase—she felt a pang of gratitude mixed with longing. Her family had always been her foundation, and while the distance was painful, she knew it was worth it.

"I'm doing this for them too," she whispered to herself, her voice quiet but resolute. She wanted to make them proud, to show them that all the sacrifices they'd made for her education weren't in vain.

Still, the emptiness crept in during moments like these. Sophia promised herself that she would visit them soon, even if it meant juggling assignments and deadlines. For now, she would keep pushing forward, to teach, to nurture.

Chapter 2

The first time Sophia stepped onto the sprawling university campus, she felt a heady rush of excitement mixed with a tinge of nervousness. Now, two years later, those feelings had settled into something much deeper—a quiet determination. She was finally one step closer to living the dream she found at the dining table all those years ago. Sophia had taken the leap, moved away from her family, and carved out a place for herself in this new chapter of her life.

University had been everything she hoped for and more. Her courses were challenging, but she loved the thrill of learning, of piecing together the puzzle of teaching and understanding how to truly connect with students.

It wasn't just the academics that made her time special; it was the sense of belonging she had found. Her flatmates had become a second family, her little corner of the library was her sanctuary, and her planner was filled with scribbles of goals and deadlines, steadily bringing her closer to the day she would stand in front of her very own classroom. Now in her second year, things had finally found their place.

But not everything was perfect. She missed her family the most, especially her little brother. Every phone call with him felt like a tug at her heartstrings. He had grown so much in the time she had been away—his voice deeper, his jokes sharper. Her parents, too, were always on her mind. She imagined them at the dinner table, her mom asking how their day went, her dad shaking his head at the news on TV. The town that knew and loved and grew up in and made memories in throughout her whole life. She ached for those moments, but she knew she had to sacrifice to achieve what she wanted.

Morning brought with it a nervous flutter in some part of her. After all, it was an important day or rather an important exam. Not to say she didn't prepare well for it. In fact she spent so much time learning, understanding, poring over textbooks and flashcards, practising. She should feel prepared but part of her wondered why she felt a little detached to her work.

The exam hall only made her anxiety worse. Rows of desks stretched endlessly, the overhead lights humming faintly. The air was thick with tension as students shuffled to their seats, brains whirring with information they likely fed themselves just the night before.

Sophia told herself to breathe. It's just an exam. She sat down, her palm clammy from squeezing her pen, and stared at the exam paper in front of her. The words blurred for a moment before coming into focus.

As she began, the gnawing anxiety blossomed into a reality. The first question was nothing like anything she had revised. Panic started bubbling in her chest. She skipped one question, then the next, looking for something, a single foothold. As she turned the final page, her heart sank with certainty. This was useless. She was done for.

Her pen trembled in her hand as she scribbled down half-formed answers, her thoughts scattered and chaotic. The harder she tried to focus, the more elusive the solutions became. She glanced around the room, seeing other students scribbling furiously, their faces a mix of concentration and determination. She felt like an outsider, as if the walls were closing in on her.

When the invigilator called time, Sophia's hands were trembling as she handed in her paper. She walked out of the exam hall in a daze, the weight of failure pressing down on her chest. The sun was shining outside, but she barely noticed it. She had worked so hard, poured so much of herself into this, and yet it felt like it had all crumbled in an instant.

Sophia found herself sitting on a bench near the campus garden, staring blankly at the grass. For the first time in a long while, doubt began to creep in, clouding the bright future she had envisioned. Was she really cut out for this? Had she made a mistake thinking she could handle it all? And most importantly, had she lost... her reason?

