Chapter One

Noosha: A beautiful flower at bud

Noosha was a very beautiful girl. Right from her childhood, she had always been the favorite girl of all her admirers in the village. Many of her age mates loved to call her friends.

Nobody could tell her origin. It was certainly clear to all the people in the village that the farmer was not the biological father of Noosha. It all happened that suddenly, there was a baby girl crying in the house of the poor farmer.

Healdsburg was a really small village with not too many houses. The larger portion of the vast land of the village was preoccupied with farming. However, the people were in hundreds and one could identify if there was a stranger in the land or not. So, when the farmer brought in a baby girl, everybody knew she was not his biologically. Moreover, he just got wedded to his wife not quite long. And his wife was not pregnant as at then. As a matter of fact, everybody could tell what's up with individual inhabitants of the village, because it is a little town with few houses.

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Before Mr. Jones, the poor farmer, got married. His father had always wanted him to marry his rich friend's daughter. Though his father was poor, too, he had connection with rich friends because he was really hardworking. Everybody always needed his service around their farmlands. So he had won the friendship of many who related to him based on his ability to work well.

However, there was this friend of Mr Jones' father that really loved him and wished to give his daughter in marriage to Jones, once he was ready. But there was a clause to it. He must be educated. He must have become a certified Mechanical Engineer.

To Jones, that was another way of telling his father,

"I can't give my daughter to your son."

This is because, the only means of education then was homeschool. It was only those that could afford a teacher would have their children learned in the professions they desired. Jones' was practically a laborer for almost all the farm owners in the village. He had only been able to acquire small piece of land from the proceed of his labor, and that where he cultivated what his family lived on. So he could not afford to hire a teacher of such a highly respected profession at that time.

He called his son, one day and told him the fact about the people of Healdsburg village,

"Son, I have always told you that I came to settle here because it's more or less a farm settlement, where I could work and earn a living to feed myself and my family. I never belonged to the rich or the royal family.

There's only one thing I have discovered about this people, in my twenty-five years of living here. They tend to cherish family history more than anything else. The rich would only want to marry the rich,while the royal continue with the same family lineage. No family wants to settle for the less.

Son, you have to create your own family history." The father advised.

Jones got the message and immediately took his mind off the rich man's daughter.

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The people of Healdsburg had a certain day every month, when the farmers would bring their farm produces to the central market for exhibition. It used to involve other farmers and buyers from the neighboring villages. It was usually a much anticipated event for everybody, most especially the poor families who would want to buy things at affordable price. Moreover, it was the only large farm market that people could easily trade by barter.

Fortunately, Jones' father had gathered enough produce for exhibition and Jones was well prepared to make good use of this opportunity to make the best sales for the family.

The market opened early enough and the event went on really competitive in terms of produce packaging and pricing. Jones was really good at convince buyer to choose from his stall of tubbers and vegetables.

At noon, when every marketing activities was getting wrapped up, Jones was already laying his back to rest a little when a very beautiful young lady called for his attention.

"Hello...hello..." She called, to gently wake the already sleeping Jones.

Jones tried to conceal the fact that he was a little startled back to consciousness, in other no to repel the potential customer.

"Hi...thanks for stopping by our veg and tubbers stand. What would you like to buy, today?" He quickly recited what he had always been saying to welcome every customer, trying to regain his composure from sleep. The young woman noticed his flight. However, it was simply funny to her. So she couldn't help but laugh softly at him.

"Please, give me potatoes, onions and cabbage." She eventually ordered and stretched her basked toward Jones.

"Oh...be right back, madam!" He promised and quickly dash inside for all her orders.

In few minutes, he came back with all and politely uttered

"Here you go. And for the stress, you can have this, this and then this to it. Thanks for your patronage, my lady."

"Oh...thanks. That's kind of you." She appreciated.

As the lady set to leave, Jones asked,

"Forgive me, lady, you seem new around here. Are you from the neighboring village?"

"Yes. I am from Middle Town, a village next to yours, here." She calmly replied.

"Wow! That's cool. My name is Jones." He quickly said, as he stretched his hand for a handshake.

"Cecilia. My name is Cecilia." She replied with a smile.

It was love at first sight. Both Cecilia and Jones already fallen in love with each other. For the rest of that day, Jones was always on top of the world. He could not wait to meet Cecilia again. So, it was for Cecilia, too. They both kept keeping appointment at the market, every exhibition day. On a certain market day, Jones had to propose to Cecilia.

"Marry me." He humbly proposed, looking into Cecilia's eyeballs.

"I can't. I have a baby girl. I am sorry." She replied. She almost regretted telling Jones the truth, because she would not want to lose what they share now. She had never told anyone before, except for her Mom, she now lived with.

"How? Are you married?" Jones asked, trembling at the truth and the staring fact that he was about to lose the second woman again.

"No. I am not. It's complicated. I would not want to talk about it." Cecilia responded and gently released her hand from Jones' tender grip.

"Please, tell me everything. I promise to keep it a secret forever." Jones implored.

"I was a maid, before now, to a very wicked Master. The wife was really good to me. But the man tried everything to make me lie with him, which I constantly refused.

I was alone, one day, when he forced me and had intercourse with me. After that horrible experience, he threatened he would kill me, if I ever told his wife about it.

I couldn't even bear the guilt of looking into his wife's eyes. So, I begged to resign and he gladly obliged. His wife tried to know why I had to do so, but I never told her.

I went back to my mother and told her everything. We both agreed to keep it a top secret because we know how dangerous that man could be. Unfortunately, I was already pregnant for him and I didn't know untill I was about six months gone.

It's two years now. I and my mother have kept the paternity of the baby a secret from everyone in the village." She sadly narrated.

Jones, rather than being agree or disappointed, had pity on Cecilia. He could imagine the pain and lots more that she must have been going through. Jones promised to accept the child if Cecilia would marry him. It was a great relief for Cecilia. At least she would be far away from her village and she would no longer have to keep hiding the child from the wicked Master.

Consequently, she agreed to marry Jones. They both secretly got married and she moved in with Jones, at first, without the baby. After about three months later, she went by night and brought the baby to their home. Noosha was almost three years old, by then. Mr. Jones became a fulltime farmer after settling down with his wife, Cecilia. Together they raised Noosha and five male children. Noosha was the only girl among them. Not many people knew how the farmer got to become the father of Noosha. Both the farmer and Cecilia kept the secret and never told anybody.

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Growing up, Noosha was did not have many friends. But there were just two of them that she really shared her childhood with. Jane and Jazmine. Jane was a very smart girl that loves solving puzzles. She was highly calculative and oftentimes correct whenever she made a projection about anything.

Jane was the only child of her parents. And they always do whatever she wanted. When she was about to start homeschool at age six, she insisted her parents must include Noosha and Jazmine, her friends. She claimed she could not attend the class alone without anybody to compete with. She convinced her parents that would not like to be alone in the class, that she would need one or two classmates that would challenge and bring the best in her.

Being a smart girl and because her parents were rich enough to afford enrolling Noosha and Jazmine, they agreed and asked her to first talk to her friends about it, first.

The following morning, after breakfast, she ran down to Noosha's place, and both went to Jazmine's residence that was just two houses away.

"Girls, I've got great new for both of you!" Jane started excitedly.

"Ok... that sounds fun. So, what is it?" Jasmine inquired with a glow on her face. While Noosha was just searching Jane's face to be sure she was going to say what would make sense to all. At times, Jane could be pulling the girls' legs with jokes and riddles.

"It had better be a serious one today, Jane." Noosha said with an expression that did not show she was ready for the news.

"Yeah...It is, I promise." Jane responded even with much excitement.

"So, what is it, please tell us, Jane." It obvious Jazmine couldn't wait any longer. Her ears were already itching.

"I am starting a homeschool this summer and it's going to be us, three, in my house!" She eventually spelt it out loud.

"Do you mean, we are going to join you in your homeschool?" Noosha asked, wanting to be sure she heard Jane very well. She had always desired to learn the mastery of English Language. Her dream was to become a home teacher, one day, so that she could teach her children and help others in the neighborhood, too. Noosh's parents could not afford a homeschool. She silently wished Jane was not saying this to prank them, this time.

"Yes. That's what I meant. I have spoken with my parents and they have asked me to inform you, girls. So, inform your parents about it. We are starting next week." Jane proudly affirmed.

Several moments after the good news, Jasmine was still in deep thought. Her fair was that her parents might not consent to it. This is a golden opportunity she would not want to lose. Also, for the fact it was going to be the three of them in a school, she could not imagine miss out on this.

Jazmine father was a watch repairer. He was known across the whole village for his expertise in this profession. He did not attend any homeschool for it. He only learned as an apprentice with the former King's watch repairer. He had always claimed that it was not really compulsory that all children must be homeschooled. He claimed many could be enrolled in apprenticeship to learn by practicals whatever they would have learnt in the homeschool, if they had the opportunity. He had been able to convince many poor parents that also could not afford homeschool for their children.

This was what Jazmine dreaded. Would he not say no and subject me to apprenticeship, eventually?

Jasmine knew she had a great deal of huddle to cross on this, but was hoping the Mom would help her convince the father.

She quickly fall among before Jane or Noosha could notice her apprehension. After spending a great time playing together at Jazmine's place, it was time to call it a day. Jazmine saw the other girls off a little distance away from home and quickly turned back home.

The moment she arrived home, she went straight to her mom and said.

"Mom, I would like to beg you for something."

"What is it, sweet pea?" She asked

"Jane's parents have agreed that we can join in the same homeschool with her. Please, can I join?" Jazmine begged.

"It's a great idea. I overheard you girls when you were discussing it. The challenge is talking to you Dad about it. But don't worry, I am going to make him see good in it." Jazmine mother assume her.

By now, Jazmine was right over the moon with great excitement.

For Noosha, it was easy for her to convince her parents. She was able to get their consent because they knew Jane and trusted her parents.

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The homeschool started right at Jane's residence and the girls were really excited about it.

"Hello. My name is Mr. Matthew. I will be your Elementary grade instructor. I hope you enjoy the class. I want you to note down some of the subjects we are going to be doing, this session. We will do some topics in Arithmetics, Elementary Science and Reading passages in English Language.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me." He concluded.

Mr. Matthew appeared disciplined in the way he dressed. He was fairly old. He should be around his late fifties. The girls seemed to like him. Though he would not permit indiscipline, he had a great sense of humor and was able to relate well according to individual's pace of learning. It was not to long that the girl knew how to read.

Noosha now enjoyed reading stories, which actually gladdened the heart of her mom. She came home one day, after school, and called her mom.

"Mom, can I read to you? It a new story and I am sure you would love to hear it." She assured.

"Well, it's ok. I am all ears, please go ahead." Mrs Cecilia said as she found for herself a seat and sat beside Noosha.

"It's a story about the white horse and the race." She calmly informed.

"Ok. I'd love to hear it, sweet pea." She said, now paying more attention.

"Long time ago, in the animal kingdom, there lived a very beautiful white horse that was always winning the race. This made everyone to respect him, both young and old. Due to this, the white horse was always confident in himself that when it comes to race, no animal could compete with him.

However, something very strange happened in the long run. It was another race competition. Every animal had started preparing for the race but the white horse felt there was no need, since no animal could defeat him in the race.

The squirrel was another animal in that kingdom that had always wished he could win. He just was not comfortable with the fact that the white horse was almost turning himself to a god. Many animals respected the white us because of two things; he was very handsome and could run faster than any other animal in that kingdom.

On this occasion, the squirrel planned on how he could win the race. There was only one idea that came to his mind. If only he could outwit the horse, he would defeat him. Then, he went straight to the white horse house and began to eulogize him.

"Hello the god of the track. Till kingdom comes, you will always win the race." The squirrel kept flattering the white horse.

As a result, the white horse was happy and proud, the more.

'Dear squirrel, thanks for the acknowledgement. I appreciate it. What do you want me to do for you?" He asked.

"Nothing. I just came to advise that you may not need to practice at all for the race. Everybody already knows you will still be the winner." The squirrel advised.

"Oh... that's wise of you. I've been thinking about that too. Thanks, my good friend." The white horse agreed.

The white horse continued to play rather than prepare for the race. He kept eating and drinking. He was not exercising his muscles for the track event. Consequently, the white horse grew really fat and heavy. He was so big that he could not carry himself easily. When he realized this, it was already too late for him to adjust, because the race was going to come up the following day.

On the deal day, every animal fit enough for the competition were already out on the track, working out their skills and jogging, as they get ready for the competition. This time, the animals started looking around for the while horse but he was yet to show up at the event. Few minutes later, the white horse managed to walk in. Many wondered how the white horse had suddenly become really big.

The horse managed to be on the track and as the referee shot the gun, every animal began to run, including the squirrel. The white horse thought it was going to be like the other times, he did his best to win this time, but he had become too heavy to lift himself. He was already sweating and breathing really hard. Suddenly, the squirrel ran past him and, for the first time, the animals watching the race could not believe what they saw.

The great crowd of animal kept cheering the squirrel. With a little more effort, he was able to get to the finishing line first. It was a really great day for the squirrel. Every animal was proud of the squirrel. On the other hand, the white horse bent his head in shame, as nobody noticed or gave him any attention. This is because he was not the winner.

So the white horse learned his lesson, the hard way, that it is good to always prepare." Noosha concluded.

"Mom, did you enjoy my story? What other lesson have you learned from the story?" She asked, just as Mr. Matthew would always ask the girls.

"Well, I think your story also teaches us to remain humble and not be too proud or egocentric." Mrs. Cecilia also added.

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When Noosha was about twelve years old, it was just about few weeks to complete her elementary homeschooling with Jane and Jazmine, she lost her mom. Mrs. Cecilia had be seriously down with cancer of the lungs. None of the family members knew what was really her health challenge. All they could tell was that she was always coughing out loud.

Noosha has suggested her mom went to the physician for treatment, but there was no money. There was only one physician in the whole village. Because of the fact that Dr. Albert charged exorbitantly, many did not trust his competence. It was only the rich that often patronized him, the poor would rather use herbal medicine, instead. Unfortunately, this was not working. Mrs. Cecilia kept managing through because whatever the family realized every harvest season from the small farm was only enough to feed.

Her condition grew so worse that she began to cough out blood from the lungs. By now, she was always walking around with a handkerchief to cover her mouth whenever she began to cough. She might cough several minutes, none stop. Everybody was afraid she might not survive it. Noosha would sometime ask in fear,

"Mom, are you going to die?"

And Mrs Cecilia would reply,

"Sweet pea, I am still here."

Sadly, the day she was going to die, Noosha was still at Jane's residence. The school was over for the day. However, she chose to wait behind in order to do her homework with the girls. As soon as the girls were through, she headed home. As she was approaching home, she met the community health workers carrying the wrapped body of her mom into a parked ambulance in from of the house.

She was going to start asking what was happening when she noticed her Dad talking to somebody that looked like the head of the team of the community health worker. She quickly ran to her Dad.

"Dad, who are these people? Where is mom? What's happening in our house and why are they here?" Noosha could not wait for her dad to answer one of her numerous questions. She left her dad to go round the house, looking for her mom. Unfortunately, when she did not find anybody that looked like her mom, she came back to the living, where her dad was waiting with the officer.

"Sweet pea, your mom couldn't make it. They said the cough was as a result of the lungs cancer that has grown really badly. I am sorry." Mr. Jones tried to console Noosha.

For a couple of dates, later, it was a great emotional shutdown for Noosha. It was a great loss to her. It was as if she would not survive it. As a matter of fact, she lost interest in everything; her dream to become a teacher, so that she could help others, left her. She was just mourning the loss of her mom. Sometimes in her sleep, she would scream out loud, calling, 'Mom!'.

Due to the loss of her mother, Noosha had to stop the homeschool. She kept following her father to the farm. But things were never the same for Noosha again.

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For Mr. Jones, the poor farmer, things became seriously unbearable for him, most especially his finance. When Mrs. Cecilia was alive, it was much easier, as she was generating some fund for the family through her petty sewing business. Now that she was gone, it had become really hard to fend for the family.

Noosha could not do much to help. She started acting as mother to the rest of her siblings, been the oldest. She would sometimes have to hold the family together till their father came home. Eventually, Noosha became too busy for Jane and Jazmine that they had to let her be. Though she missed her friends, she had to face the new challenge now.

To argument the income from the little farm, Mr. Jones had no other choice than to help other farmers on their farmlands. With this, he was able to sustain the family a little longer. That was how the family continued to live from hands to mouth. until Noosha became sixteen years old.