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## The Note Between the Notes

By Amelia “Mia” A.

Addie’s planner was a battlefield. Each page was a minefield of due dates, circled tests, and scribbled reminders in increasingly frantic handwriting. Honors Algebra quiz Friday. English essay due Thursday. Science fair proposal overdue. Choir rehearsal every week before school. Her life was a symphony of expectations, and lately, every note felt off-key.

She sat in the back row of the choir room, her binder open but untouched. The other students were warming up, their voices rising in scales that felt like taunts. Addie used to love this room — the way the notes flew through the high ceilings, the way the piano keys seemed to hum even when untouched. But now, it felt like another place where she was failing.

“Addie,” came a voice, gentle but firm. Mrs. Murry, the choir director, stood by the piano, her baton resting against her shoulder. “Are you with us today?”

She nodded, forcing a smile. “Yeah. Just tired.”

She didn’t press. She never did. But her eyes lingered a moment longer than usual before she turned back to the group.

Addie tried to sing. She really did. But her voice cracked on the high notes, and her timing was off. She saw Riley glance at her from the soprano row — a quick flicker of concern — but she looked away before he could say anything.

Riley is her best friend. She was the kind of person who made everyone feel like they belonged, like the world was a little less sharp when he was around. She was also the only person who knew just how much Addie was struggling.

Later that afternoon, as they walked to their lockers, Riley nudged her shoulder.

“You okay?”

She shrugged. “Just tired.”

“You’ve said that every day this week.”

Addie didn’t answer. She stared at her locker, willing it to open with telepathy because even turning the dial felt like too much.

Riley leaned against the wall. “You failed that science quiz, didn’t you?”

She flinched. “Thanks.”

“I didn’t mean it like that. I just... I know you. You’re Addie. You’re the girl who color-codes her notes and gets mad when she gets a 94. Something’s off.”

Addie’s throat tightened. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I’m trying, Riley. I stay up late studying, I skip lunch to finish homework, I practice choir pieces until my voice gives out. And still... I’m slipping.”

Riley was quiet for a moment. Then she said, “You know, Mrs. Murry asked me to help organize the solo auditions for the spring concert. She wants you to try out.”

Addie laughed, bitterly. “Why? So I can crack in front of the whole school?”

“She thinks you’re good. I think you’re good.”

“I used to be.”

Riley looked at her, really looked at her, and said, “You still are. You’re just tired of pretending you’re not human.”

That night, Addie sat at her desk, her open computer staring back at her like judges. She closed them. For the first time in weeks, she let herself cry. Not the quiet, controlled tears she shed in bathroom stalls at school, but the kind that came from somewhere deeper — the kind that said, *I’m overwhelmed and I don’t know how to fix it.*

The next day, she stayed after choir class. Mrs. Murry was stacking sheet music when she approached.

“Can I talk to you?”

She looked up, surprised but not unkind. “Of course.”

Addie hesitated. “I think I’m burning out.”

She nodded slowly, setting the music down. “I’ve noticed.”

“You have?”

“I’ve been teaching long enough to see when a student is carrying more than just a backpack.”

Addie sat on the edge of the risers. “I don’t know how to keep up anymore. Honors classes, choir, expectations... I feel like I’m drowning.”

Mrs. Murry sat beside her. “Addie, you’re not a machine. You’re a person. A brilliant, hardworking, passionate person. But even the best instruments need tuning. Even the strongest voices need rest.”

She looked down. “I’m scared I’m not enough.”

Mrs. Murry smiled gently. "You are enough. Not because of your grades or your solos. Because you're you. And that's more than enough."

Addie didn't say anything, but something inside her shifted — like a string pulled taut finally loosening.

Over the next few weeks, she made changes. Small ones at first. She talked to her teachers about extensions. She let herself sleep. She started eating lunch with Riley again instead of cramming in the library. And slowly, her spark returned.

She auditioned for the solo. Her voice still cracked once, but she kept going. When she finished, the room was silent for a beat — then Mrs. Murray clapped, and Riley whooped from the back row.

She didn't get the solo. But she didn't need it.

The night of the spring concert, Addie stood in the second row, her choir dress freshly pressed, her heart steady. As the lights dimmed and the first notes filled the auditorium, she looked out into the crowd and saw her parents beaming. She saw Mrs. Murray nod, just once.

And for the first time in a long time, she felt like herself again.

Not perfect. Not invincible. But whole.

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