



The
BULLY
PATROL

The
Secret is Out

Kathy Auman

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by

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CHAPTER ONE

Goodbye Middle School

The end of our school year was great. We had our class trip, our eighth grade dance, and of course, graduation. All of us got various awards for the different clubs we belonged to and for participation in activities throughout the year. And some of us even made the Honor Roll. During commencement, the principal mentioned the Bully Patrol and how the school policies will change and be strictly enforced from now on. They were working on a plan to have in place for the next school year in September. That really did make us proud that we were able to help make a difference.

Now we had another long summer to get through. The five of us did everything together. We always had at least one person, if not more, to do stuff with. We became more like sisters than friends. Of course, our interests started to change as we became more aware of our appearance. We did each

other's makeup and hair, trying to find our new looks. We borrowed clothes from each other and made up different outfits, some of which were a little crazy, but we had fun experimenting.

We also had chores to do at home, as we were getting older, and our parents wanted us to help out around the house. But most of all, we continued going to our martial arts classes. We enjoyed learning new techniques and staying fit. We wanted to improve and to keep moving up and earn different colored belts and, maybe someday, get good enough to earn our black belts. We knew that would really take a lot of work.

CHAPTER TWO

The Start of the New Beginner Classes

We settled into our summer routines, and our first afternoon martial arts class was quite a surprise. When we got there, it was really crowded with new beginner students. We recognized many of them from school. When we walked in, they turned and stared at us as if we were some kind of celebrities. Some of the parents even applauded us and made their way over to shake our hands. We were shocked and didn't know how to react to all of this, so we remained humble, like we were taught.

One of the moms told me her children were very impressed with us and hoped they would do well also. I told her that if they were serious and did the work, they would learn more than just self-defense. They would learn the

physical parts of martial arts, like self-defense and their katas, which are the routines you must learn to earn your different colored belts. Everyone starts out with a white belt, then yellow, green, blue, red, then black. If they put in the work and practice, it was worth it, and they would be more physically fit, but they would also be taught self-confidence, control, and respect. They would be taught to remain humble and not become bullies themselves. They would need to come to every class ready to work and also practice at home. It would be nice for her children because they could practice together at home also. She was happy to hear this and signed up her three sons that afternoon.

Our Sensei, Master D., looked a little overwhelmed but happy with all of his new students. Our whole class did our normal class routines with a demonstration of each of the katas with the new parents and students watching. Afterwards, most of them were eager to sign up for the upcoming summer classes. Some of the parents even joined for the evening adult classes. The parents were happy to hear there was a beginner class discount also. This would make it easier on them and help to weed out those who were not serious.

Master D. was overjoyed at the turn out he saw of all of the new students. He asked us to stay after class, so he could talk to us, and of course, we said yes.

He found out what we did last year at school and thought it was dangerous and could have had serious consequences, but in the end, it all worked out fine. He also saw that we had developed quite the following and wanted to offer us a chance to help out with all of the new beginner students. He would offer us a deep discount on our own classes and possibly a

bonus at the end of summer. We were very excited to accept his offer and thought it would fun. Even though it would take up more time, it was summer, so we agreed we could handle it. Master D. said he would make up the schedules and let us know the next day.

We talked about this on the way home. Julia said, “Wow what a great opportunity this is for all of us.”

Olivia replied, “Yeah, we get to spend more time at the Dojo—and get paid for it too!”

We were very excited and couldn’t wait to get started. Our parents were very happy, not only with the discounted rates, but also that we would have less time on our hands during the summer months, and we were doing something worthwhile.

CHAPTER THREE

The First Day of Class

We showed up early for the first beginner class, so Master D. could explain to us how he wanted to run this class a little different than our beginner class because this group was so large.

Master D. opened up the class himself, explaining what martial arts was all about. He said that, “This is more than just fighting,” and they would learn more than just how to protect themselves. They would learn

Agility: to be steady on their feet;

Awareness: to know what is going on around you at all times;

Control: to be patient and not fly off the handle when a situation arises;

Self-Confidence: to realize you can handle any situation, but not creating bad situations;

Respect: for yourselves and all others.

“These are some of the things we will work on this summer. Learning the different moves and holds, along with working your katas, will teach you how to protect yourselves,” he concluded. He also strongly stressed that he did not want to create a group of bullies to go out and cause trouble. If he found anyone was doing this, they would not be allowed back in his class. He wanted to make sure everyone understood this.

He then had us girls show the class some of the basic stances and moves they would be taught. We also demonstrated the beginner’s kata. We preformed it in perfect unison, which really seemed to impress the students.

We then broke off into smaller groups by age and size. Some of the younger kids were a little harder to keep under control as they were going around karate chopping and kicking each other, but we soon got them to settle down.

All in all, the first day went well. Master D. told us that, in the beginning, the kids are very excited and have a hard time paying attention, but after a few classes, the kids would become students of the art and become more focused, and he was right; they all did.

CHAPTER FOUR

Summer Comes to an End

The summer went by very quickly as we were so busy. Helping out at the Dojo was a good experience for us. To our surprise, we went away with learning a valuable lesson, too. We learned patience, kindness, and how to give back to others. The patience part was the hardest, but we got through it, and our students did very well.

Graduation Day was here, and the room was filled with many parents and all of our students. When it was time to start, Master D. quietly stood at the front of the room. The students went to their places and quietly waited to begin. The parents were in shock, and they soon realized that Master D. ran a no-nonsense school: When it was time to get to work, that was what we did.

Master D. explained the progress the kids made over the summer and how they all became students of martial arts. The students performed their beginner katas, to the delight of their parents. He told the parents that most of these students would soon be ready to test for their first colored belt, which is the yellow belt, if they choose to continue. He then called each one up front and bowed to them and gave them a certificate of completion for the course. The students were very proud of themselves, as were their parents. They couldn't believe the respect Master D. taught their children and how they all looked up to him. They were also amazed at the difference these classes made in their children, and most of them signed them up again for the up-coming year.

Afterwards, Master D. thanked us girls for all of the hard work, not only for helping out with the beginner class, but also for keeping up with our own classes. He then gave us each a bonus and told us we would soon be ready to test for our first degree black belts in the spring, which really made our day.

We had a really good summer, but it was coming to an end. We had high school to look forward to.

CHAPTER FIVE

Getting Ready For High School

It was very exciting to learn that we would soon be ready to test for our first degree black belts this spring. So now we really needed to concentrate on perfecting our katas and skills. We would work hard so that when the time came, we would be ready.

But now we needed to get prepared to go off to high school. We were excited and also a little bit scared. We realized that last year, in middle school, we were the big fish in a little pond, but this year, we would be the little fish in a big pond. The unknown was a little frightening, and we decided to try to stick together as best as we could. Hopefully, we would have some classes together and that would make it easier.

We had a week to get through before school started and thought we could have a little fun. So instead of worrying about all of that, we decided to use some of our bonus money to get some new clothes for school. We went shopping at the

mall, and we each picked out two new outfits. We had fun trying on all of the clothes, mixing and matching and coming up with new outfits. We laughed at some of the crazy stuff that Olivia and Maddie were coming up with, and really had a good time. In the end, we thought that if we each bought stuff that we could coordinate with each other, it would look like we had a lot more outfits, so that is what we did.

We also played around with hairstyles and makeup and came up with some more pretty crazy stuff. We had a lot of laughs with some of these creations we came up with, and at one point, Olivia looked like a clown. But in the end, we decided on a more conservative look for each of us.

So the day before high school started, we thought we were ready. That night, as I went to bed, I was thinking about the past two year and how we became such good friends, and about all that we had been through together, and pulling off the Secret Bully Patrol last year. Without even realizing it, we formed such a special bond between us that was amazing. Here we were, moving into the next chapter of our lives together, knowing we would always have each other's backs no matter what. Friends like that are hard to find, and it made me feel very special to have found that.

That night, I slept very peaceful and woke up rested and ready to face the world.

CHAPTER SIX

Off to High School

The day had come to start this new adventure, and we were both excited and apprehensive at the same time. Luckily, we were all on the same bus, and we got to walk in together. As ninth graders, we had to report to the auditorium to get our assigned home rooms. We then went to meet our home room teachers and receive our rosters. The school was huge, and we thought we would never find our way around. I'm sure, after a few days, we would learn our way around just fine. Walking through the halls, some of the students seemed so big to us. I assumed they were the juniors and seniors of the school.

Our home room teacher gave us some papers to take home to our parents and told us the rules to follow and what was expected of us. She then took us on a tour of the school to help us find our way around. We then had to follow our rosters to the different classes and meet our teachers. This is when we found out who was in our class and met some of the new students we didn't know. We found out that some of us girls had classes together, which was good.

Walking through the halls I noticed that some of the other students were staring at me and the other girls, pointing and whispering to each other. The other girls noticed it, too. At first I didn't know what this was about, but then it dawned on me that maybe they heard what we did last year. I thought our reputation had gotten out. I sure hoped this would not become a problem for us this year.

I guess we'd have to wait and see...

CHAPTER SEVEN

Life Changing Moments

The first few days of school were a real struggle. Trying to find our classes and get there on time was a problem, but it got easier every day. We continued to get the stares from some of the other kids, but we thought that would soon stop, too.

One day, as I was trying to make my way to class, I saw Ralph in the crowded hallway. He was one of the thugs from last year who terrorized our middle school. He and his friends wound up getting into big trouble because of us. We both saw each other at the same time, and he quickly looked away and disappeared into the crowd. I saw Ralph again a couple of days later, and this time he approached me in the hallway.

At first, I was a little scared because I didn't know if he was about to start something as revenge from last year. But he seemed different somehow this year. He calmly asked me if we could talk after school, and something in his eyes told me to say yes. I told him we could meet in front of the library after school. Just as he was walking away, Julia and Olivia came

around the corner and ran over to me, thinking something was wrong.

Julia asked, “What did he say? Are you alright?”

I said, “He just wants to talk, and he really seems different somehow.”

I told them we were meeting after school, and Olivia said, “You are not going by yourself. What if this is a set-up? Remember last year?”

I told them I thought this would be okay, but they didn’t trust him and agreed to go with me. The three of us met after school first, and we went to the library together.

Ralph was there waiting for me by himself when we got there. We kept looking around for the other thugs, thinking this was a trap, but no one else showed up. He started to talk, and looking me straight in the eyes, he thanked us for putting into motion the events that followed after they left the court room that day. The fine and the community service weren’t so bad, but the Tough Love Camp was terrible. This place was run with military-style discipline to help teens learn to follow direction and to lead a good life. He said they were pushed around, screamed at, and bullied 24/7 for the first few weeks. He said he got to see how what he did made people feel and didn’t like the feeling of being alone and scared. He also went to anger management therapy while he was there, and that seemed to help a lot. He realized that his home life with his parents always fighting had a lot to do with his actions. He wrote home with this new discovery to explain to his parents and hoped it wasn’t affecting his younger brother and sister as well. His parents saw what a problem their fighting had become to their children and went to marriage counseling.

When Ralph returned home after the long summer away, he was a different person, and his home life also changed drastically for the better. He wanted to thank us and to tell us how sorry he was for all of the trouble he caused.

As the girls and I listened to Ralph, we were shocked at first at what he had to experience, but we were happy with the way it turned out. The girls and I were glad to not only see the change in Ralph, but to hear how much his home life changed for the better. I told him to keep working on himself and that I hoped we could be friends. He was so grateful for our understanding and happy that we got a chance to talk. We told the other girls Ralph's story, and we were so glad at how it turned out for him and his family.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Birth of the New Bully Patrol

After the first week of school, it got easier to find our way around and not feel lost all of the time. There were a lot of clubs and after school activities to consider joining. We thought we probably would have a lot of homework this year being in high school, so we needed to manage our time, so we could still attend our martial arts classes. The thought of being able to test for our first degree black belt was on each of our minds, and we were very excited about that. So we each chose one or two extra school activities that we were interested in, and that would do for now.

A few weeks later, the school wanted to start an anti-bullying club. They asked the five of us to come to the first meeting, so they could get our input. We went and sat there quietly, listening to the new policies they were putting into place. The problem was, they still needed eyes and ears throughout the school to watch out for any problems that might arise. They

also didn't want the club members to have a target on their back and to put themselves in danger. They needed to get more adults involved and to come up with a plan.

Just then, my mom sent me a text message on my cell phone, and I came up with an idea. Since most kids had cell phones these days, we could somehow use them to communicate with each other while on patrol. The principal thought that was a good idea and that they would come up with a way to use them before the next meeting.

That night, at martial arts class, I told Master D. about the new bully patrol club the school was starting. He said it was a good idea, but he thought that before it started, the members should all have a little bit of training on self-defense, just to be safe. He offered to come to the next meeting and show them some basic moves, so they could protect themselves if they needed to. The principal also thought this was a good idea, so we set it up for the next meeting. Word spread about the new club and that we were involved, and the turn-out was huge. There were so many kids and parents there that we had to move the meeting to the gym for more room. There were also some officials from other schools there to see how they could start something like this at their schools, too.

They opened the meeting with the plan to use the cell phones. The computer club at our school came up with a special app for our phones to use for this purpose only. Every member would install this app on their phones, so they could communicate with each other with club business **only**. Also, there would be a special code to use for emergencies in case there were any problems. This way, the adults could locate them and get there quickly. We were told not to confront or interact

with any trouble makers, just to report back to the office and let the adults handle it. But in case we did find ourselves in trouble, we needed to know some ways to protect ourselves.

That's when Master D. was called up to demonstrate some basic moves of self-defense. He asked for a few volunteers, and a couple of the kids got up, including one of their fathers. He showed them how to defend themselves without even throwing a punch, and some moves and holds to use until help arrived. The whole room was very impressed, and afterwards, he helped some of the members with the holds and answered questions from many of the adults. The meeting went well, and everyone left feeling good about this new adventure.

CHAPTER NINE

Rules Are Set

Things were going pretty smooth, and the members were told not to draw attention to themselves, just to watch and report back any potential problems. The cliques were forming, and you could see some of the students who could become problems in the future. It was mostly some of the older students, juniors and seniors, who thought they were big shots. One of these guys was a senior named Jake. He always had a group of guys around him, typical bully style. He was loud and was always in the middle of the group, and when he saw me, he would point at me and laugh. He seemed to be the ring leader and was someone I needed to keep my eye on. I played it cool and pretended I didn't notice but talked it over with the other members of our club. We decided to watch this group a little more closely and not let our guard down.

I would also see Ralph in the hallways from time to time, and he would just say, "Hi," and move on. I wondered how he was doing but didn't get a chance to ask him. He seemed to have turned into a loner as he was always by himself. I found

out later that the other boys he went around with last year all transferred to another school, as they didn't want to face what they had done in middle school.

The patrol was doing okay so far. There were only a few minor incidents that were quickly brought under control. Some rules were set up and were to be strictly followed. Everyone's cell phones needed to be charged up before going on patrol, and they were not to be used during school hours for anything other than patrol business. If anyone was caught breaking this rule, their phone would be taken away, and their parents would have to come to school to get it back. And if you did this more than, once you would be out of the patrol. The adults involved would also agree that if an S.O.S. code was sent out, they would drop whatever they were doing and come to the rescue. The members were also cautioned to not send out S.O.S. codes unless there was a real problem and someone was really in trouble. This plan was going very well so far.

CHAPTER TEN

A Dangerous Situation

The Bully Patrol seemed to be working out very well, as most of the members remained anonymous, so the students knew someone was always watching, but they didn't always know who. This made it easier to monitor and stop any problems before they could get out of hand.

One afternoon, Kevin, a patrol member, was in the boy's bathroom when he heard the door bang open, and some boys came rushing in. He thought he also heard a girl's voice begging them to stop. He stayed in the stall at first to listen and then realized what was happening. He called the S.O.S. code and went out to see if he could help.

Olivia, Brian (another patrol member), and I were walking down the hallway just outside of the bathroom when we heard the commotion. We ran inside to help, and they had Kevin up against the wall and the poor girl was pinned down on the floor. One of the boys was walking around the girl asking if she wanted "some of this" while pointing at his crouch. The poor girl looked scared to death, and she was kicking and screaming

for help. He was getting ready to pounce on her when we came flying through the door. He was startled and turned around and saw me. He said, “Oh looks like someone else wants to join the party” and lunged at me.

I kicked him in the chest, knocking the wind out of him, and he fell backwards into the other boys. This gave me a chance to get into my fighting stance, and Olivia joined me. Kevin and Brian were in shock, as this was their first encounter, but they also tried to join in and help.

Just then, the school resource officer, the principal, and a couple of teachers came rushing in and quickly accessed the situation. The boys were taken to the office, and the girl (whose name was Sharon) was taken to the nurse’s office..

After everything was sorted out they found out that the boys were high on something, which explained the bizarre behavior. Their parents were called in and told what went on, and the boys were expelled from school. Sharon’s parents were also called and told about the situation. Since nothing actually happened other than her being shook up and scared, she was released to her parents. It was up to them if they wanted to pursue this any further and bring up charges on the boys, but they were told that they would be punished. We were questioned and filled out statements as to what we saw and what we did, and then we were told we could leave, too. We were thanked for putting a stop to a situation that could have been disastrous. This just proved that the Bully Patrol was a success, but it showed me that the new members needed a little more work on how to handle things.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Changes Made

That night, the girls and I went to our regular martial arts class. We needed to get down to work and prepare for our upcoming first degree black belt test this spring. Master D. said the test was very hard, and we needed to make sure we were ready.

I told him what happened at school that day and that I thought the new members needed a little more training to learn how to handle things when they came up. He said he would think about it and try to come up with a solution.

After class, he told me he had an idea, and he wanted to come to the next Bully Patrol meeting to see if anyone would be interested. The next day, I asked the principal and he said, "Absolutely," and that, "Any help would be appreciated." He contacted Master D., and the meeting was set up. The meeting was the next afternoon after school, and Master D. showed up as promised. We had our regular meeting discussing the problems that occurred the previous week and how they were handled. Then it was Master D.'s turn to present his new idea.

He would hold a quick course after school of self-defense only. It would consist of five classes after school that would be one and a half hours long, one day a week. He would only charge a small fee, so anyone who wanted to attend could afford it. He handed out flyers to the students that explained everything, so they could talk it over with their parents. He wanted to start the class the following week, so everyone interested needed to sign up quickly.

The kids were excited, and most of them brought back the permission slips and checks the next day. Some of the parents even called the school and said they thought this was a wonderful idea, and they felt their kids would be safer after taking this course. The response was really good, as many students signed up for the course. Master D. asked us if we would be willing to help out with this, and we said we would be glad to.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Growing by Leaps and Bounds

Our days and nights became very busy with school, the clubs we joined, the Bully Patrol, homework, and our own martial arts classes preparing for our own upcoming test. We helped out with the new self-defense course after school, and it was a big hit. The word got out, and some of the clubs in our community wanted Master D. to offer the course to them also. This was having a ripple effect as more and more people were interested in the course. Some of them even joined the regular martial arts classes, and his business was booming. He was juggling all of these extra courses and didn't want to neglect his regular martial arts school because that was very important to him. He hired a few of his more advanced students parttime who had various black belt degree, so they really knew what they were doing.

Our Dojo was in a strip mall in the heart of town, which made it convenient for everyone to get there. Some parents

would drop their kids off and go shopping and, when they were done, swing by and pick them up on their way home. This seemed to help out many busy parents. But we were quickly out growing the space and really needed more room with all of the new students. The afternoon and evening classes were getting crowded, and we needed more room to work out. Master D. was getting concerned about this problem. He thought we might have to move to a larger place but didn't want to give up this great location.

He started to look around for a suitable place that would fulfill our needs, but he didn't want to move to far away. He kept looking but couldn't find any place that would do. A few weeks later, the gift shop next door put up a going out of business sign, and we thought that might solve our problem. Instead of moving, we could just expand and take over the vacant store. So he talked to the landlord, and they made a deal. It would mean some renovations, but it was way better than making such a move. The students were very happy that we were staying here, as this place had become our home away from home.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A Day at the Mall

At school, we started to make some new friends, and we also started to get interested in boys. Some of us even developed crushes on some of the boys in our different classes. We didn't seem to spend as much time together as we used to, as we were busy with our school work and clubs we joined; plus socializing and flirting was exhausting. But we always found time for each other even though our lives were becoming very different. The holidays were approaching, and we would soon be off from school for over a week for winter break.

The five of us decided to spend a day at the mall and get some Christmas shopping done and have lunch. We always bought each other a little something for Christmas, and this would be fun. We invited some of our new friends and met in the food court for lunch. There wound up being 12 of us, and we thought the more the merrier. The mall looked very festive with all of the holiday decorations, and we were ready for a fun day. At lunch, the girls talked about their holiday plans. Some

had family gathering to go to and parties to attend. Some even had family members coming from out of town to visit. This put us in a great mood to start our search for those special holiday gifts.

We broke up into smaller groups and went on our search for the gifts for our family and friends. We decided to meet back at the food court at 4:00, so we could show each other our treasures and get our rides home. We had fun going store to store, looking for that *just right* gift and making an occasional purchase.

As I was coming out of one of the stores, I saw Jake, the boy from school with an angry look on his face. He had a gang of his thugs with him, and they were rushing towards us. We tried to simply walk away but soon found ourselves surrounded. He had at least a dozen other guys with him, and they were pushing us into a corner.

At first, I thought he was only trying to scare us but soon realized he meant business. They had us surrounded with our backs against the wall and nowhere to go. The two new girls were really scared, so Julia and I stepped in front of them to protect them, and hopefully they would calm down. Jake zeroed in on me, shouting about how I thought I was so tough, and he wanted to see how tough I really was. He kept pushing me trying to get me to throw the first punch. But I just stood my ground. He finally got so frustrated that I wouldn't fight with him that he threw a punch at me that I quickly blocked. I spun around and knocked his legs out from under him, and then he was laying on the floor in a heap. This even made him madder, and he jumped up and started after me with a vengeance.

People had gathered around to see what was going on, and just then, Ralph jumped through the crowd and stood in front of me. Little did I know that while all of this was going on, many people surrounded Jake and all of the thugs that were there with him. They started grabbing them, so they couldn't get away, and someone else called the police.

As I looked through the crowd I noticed that many of them were martial arts students from our Dojo. Young and old, they all stepped up to come to our rescue. That's when I realized that we had become one big happy family, and just like family, we would always have each-others backs.

And then there was Ralph, who came out of nowhere to come to our rescue. Wow! This was truly amazing.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A Surprise from Ralph

The mall security and the police arrived to see what was going on. They couldn't believe what they saw. Shoppers were involved in this big mess, holding on to Jake and his thugs, so they couldn't get away. It took a while for them to sort through the confusion, and then Jake and the boys all were arrested. The mall was going to press charges for creating a riot and threatening bodily harm, among other things. They took statements from everyone in the crowd to find out what really happened. They pretty much got the same story from everyone.

A police officer said, "It's very unusual for so many people to involve themselves in something like this, you girls must be special."

I then gave my statement, and I told him who these people were that came to our rescue. I said, "Some of the kids who are here are part of the Bully Patrol at school, and we all practice martial arts together. Also many of the adults are part of the martial arts program at our Dojo. We all look out for each other."

He then said, “How lucky we were that it turned out this way. It could have become a really bad situation, and someone could have gotten hurt.”

I said, “We are so grateful that they stepped up to help us!”

And he said, “I’ve never seen anything like this before. It looks like we have our own army to look after us!”

We all laughed.

And then there was Ralph, who came out of nowhere to help. He stayed by my side through this whole ordeal and was very supportive. I was so grateful for all of the help from everyone and especially for Ralph. He walked us back to the food court, which was on the other side of the mall to meet the other girls. We told them what happened, and they were shocked.

Olivia asked us if we were all alright, and by then, the other girls were calmed down, but they had quite a story to tell.

Emily said, “I can’t believe those guys would try to pull a stunt like that in a crowded mall!”

We all agreed, and I said that the police would sort it all out, and then we could find out why they did this.

Ralph stayed with us until our parents came to pick us up. Before my mom came to get me, he asked if I would like to go out for ice cream that night, so we could talk. I said sure, and he said he would pick me up around 7:00, if that was okay. So the date was set—if you wanted to call it that.

As I was getting ready to go out with Ralph, I was trying to think about why he wanted to talk to me. He was a big guy and quite handsome, but I never thought of him that way. The changes in him made him a lot more likable, so I decided to wait and see what this was all about.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Our First Date

Ralph showed up at exactly 7:00, and we went to the ice cream parlor in town. We each ordered our treats, and he insisted on paying. We sat down to eat our sundaes before they melted and talked about what happened that afternoon. I said I couldn't believe how he just showed up out of the crowd. He confessed that sometimes he would follow me around to make sure I was safe. This surprised me, as I always thought I was aware of my surroundings. But then I remembered I would see him from time to time, and now, I knew why. I asked him why he didn't come talk to me sooner, and he said he thought I wouldn't want anything to do with him because of last year. He wanted to let me know that he was not stalking me, that he just cared and wanted to make sure I was safe. He knew that I could take care of myself but wanted to be there for me. I thought how nice this was of him, and I started to realize that he was a gentle, caring person, and he never showed this side of himself very much.

I asked him about what was going on with him and how his home life was going. He said his home life was great. Mom

and Dad were getting along, and the other kids were really happy and doing well. He told me he was really doing well, too. He got a job after school and on weekends that he really liked, and he was also thinking about joining the martial arts class. He wanted to know what I thought about that. I told him that if he was serious, he would get a lot out of the classes, and I thought it was great.

We talked for about three hours, and I got to know him a lot better. The more I got to know the real him, the better I liked him. I thought I was even developing a little crush on him, and I think he already felt the same way, too. We had a very nice night, and when he took me home, he asked if he could see me again. I told him I would like that, and we made plans for Saturday night. I was surprised by how excited I was about this turn of events.

When I got home from my first date, I told my mom everything that happened at the mall that afternoon. She was concerned and said it seems I have become a target for some of these bullies. She told me to really be careful when I'm out in public. She was pleased at how this incident was handled and how so many people stepped up to help.

I also told her about Ralph, and she got a worried look on her face. I explained to her how much he had changed and that he was not the same person he was last year. He had been through a lot in the past year and was working to turn his life around. She thought it was wonderful how something so bad could wind up changing his life for the better and hoped it would continue. She said that, if I was going to keep seeing him, to take it slow and easy, and that she would like to meet him. She wanted to see for herself the changes in him, as all

she remembered was the angry young man in the courtroom last year. I told her the next time he picked me up, I would have him come in, so they could meet. I also assured her that if we continued to date each other, she would be seeing a lot more of him.

That night while getting ready for bed, Ralph texted me to thank me for such a nice time and said that it made him feel good to have someone he could talk to so freely. I told him that that's what friends are for. He said he hoped that someday we could become more than just friends and said goodnight. I felt myself blushing and realized that I was hoping the same thing.

While lying in bed trying to fall asleep, I was thinking about all of the recent events in my life. School, my good friends, my new friends, the Bully Patrol, martial arts class, the mall incident, and of course, Ralph. I fell asleep with a smile on my face and felt very happy.

Life was good.

Oh, yeah, and I did get another goodnight text from Ralph.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Returning to the Mall

The next day at school was the last day before winter break. Everyone was buzzing around and very excited. The teachers knew we wouldn't get much work done that day, so they tried to make it a fun day. We played games in our classes like Trivia and word games, and some of the teachers brought in holiday treats. It was good to have a fun day for a change. The Bully Patrol was still on duty that day, but everyone played nice, so it was an easy day.

I met Ralph after school and told him I needed to finish my Christmas shopping, and he said he could take me back to the mall that night if I wanted to go. I told him that would be great, but my mom wanted to meet him. He stopped dead in his tracks and got very quiet.

After a few minutes, he said, "I guess I have to face the music sometime," and agreed to meet her tonight. We made plans for him to pick me up after dinner at 7:00. I knew he was scared to finally meet my mom, but I told him she was cool and very fair. That seemed to calm him down a little bit.

The doorbell rang at exactly 7:00. When I opened the door, he seemed very nervous and worried when he came in the house. My mom was in the kitchen, and she turned around when we came in. I introduced them to each other, and she shook his hand and said it was nice to meet him. That made him feel a little more at ease.

We sat down at the kitchen table, and she asked him a few general questions, trying to hold a conversation with him to help him feel more comfortable. She told him my dad wasn't home, but he would also like to meet him. Ralph tensed up again when he heard that, so I said we had to get going, so I could finish my Christmas shopping. We said the usual goodbyes, and Mom said not to be late.

When we got outside Ralph said that wasn't too bad, but he was worried about meeting my dad. I told him my mom would give Dad a report on how it went with her, and that she was a really good judge of character, so not to worry. This seemed to make him feel better, and so off to the mall we went.

This trip to the mall was very different then the last one. The place was still busy with holiday shoppers and little kids excited to sit on Santa's lap. We watched them for a while, remembering how we felt at that age, telling each other stories about our experiences with Santa. We had a lot of laughs reminiscing about our past.

I got out my list of the remaining people I needed to buy for, and we started going store to store on the hunt for those perfect gifts. I even managed to secretly buy Ralph a nice bottle of cologne. As we were getting finished, he asked if I would like something to drink, and I said okay.

As we walked to the food court, he gently grabbed my hand, and we walked the rest of the way holding hands, much to my delight. We each got a soft drink and decided to share a giant soft pretzel. We talked a little, but Ralph seemed to be deep in thought, so I sat there watching the shoppers rush by, thinking how nice it was that Ralph was becoming part of my life. We left the mall and drove home after having another nice night together.

And again, Ralph texted me goodnight.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Getting Ready For the Holidays

The next day, I met the girls at the Dojo to help out with the beginner class. The kids were all excited about the holidays and were a little harder to handle, but we got through it okay. The Dojo would be closed between Christmas and New Year's Day, so we had more time to enjoy ourselves during the holiday's festivities.

That night, Olivia was having a sleepover at her house and asked that we show up a little early, so we could exchange our gifts before her other friends arrived. I went home from class and wrapped all of the gifts I bought in pretty paper and bows, so I was ready.

After dinner I walked over to Olivia's house, as she only lived a few houses down the street. I was looking forward to a fun night with the girls. We opened our gifts, and we all loved what we got each other. It felt like old times, just the five of us being together again, but soon, her other friends started to

arrive. We had a great time playing games, eating snacks, braiding each other's hair, and telling funny stories; and of course, talking about boys. I told them that Ralph and I had started dating, and Julia and Olivia both had a concerned look on their faces. I explained how different he is now, and that I was really starting to like him. They all thought he was really cute and we made a great couple.

One of the new girls asked how the Bully Patrol got started, and we all chimed in with our own versions of how that happened. They liked hearing about some of our adventures, and some even wanted to join the martial arts class. We had a really good time. I don't know why they call it a sleepover, as no one seems to get much sleep, but soon, we started to drift off one by one. Before I fell asleep, Ralph texted me goodnight, and I drifted off to sleep with a smile on my face.

The next morning, Olivia's mom made us a nice breakfast, and afterwards, we all thanked her as we set off for home. When I got home, my mom was getting ready to start her holiday baking. This was a family tradition every year, so I pitched in to help. We made a large assortment of Christmas cookies, candy, and brownies. We also made two of her famous rum cakes and some pumpkin pies. This took most of the day, and the kitchen was a mess, so she ordered pizza for dinner as we cleaned up the kitchen.

That night, I stayed in because I was really tired and went to bed early. Tomorrow night was Christmas Eve, and family and friends would be dropping by. I called Ralph and told him my plans and asked him if he would like to stop over and join us on Christmas Eve, too. He still hadn't met my dad yet, and this would be a good chance for them to meet. He sounded a

little nervous, but he said that would be fine, and he would be here around 8:00.

After we hung up, he texted me goodnight again.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

What a Christmas Eve Party

Christmas Eve was finally here. The tree was up and the house was beautifully decorated. It not only looked good, but it smelled good too. Mom was running around doing the last minute preparations before the guests arrived. I helped her put out the food and platters of cookies and baked goods we made yesterday. It really looked nice. The girls came over to wish my parents a Merry Christmas, and the guests started to arrive.

At 8:00, I was wondering where Ralph was, as he was always on time. So I looked outside and saw his car parked out front with a bunch of people around it. I opened the front door and realized what was happening. I heard yelling and screaming, and everyone in the house heard it, too. I ran out with the girls right behind me to see if we could help. The adults came running out, too, and someone called the police.

I saw Ralph on the ground with four older boys kicking and punching him. He was trying to fight back, but they were

getting the best of him. Me and the girls started pulling them off of Ralph, and they turned their attention on us. They started wildly throwing punches at us, which we easily blocked. They seemed to be off balance and staggering around.

Emily took a punch, but she kicked the guy, knocking him to the ground. He couldn't get back up on his own, and we realized they were all drunk.

The adults kept them there until the police arrived, and I ran over to see how Ralph was. He was beat up pretty bad with a split lip, a bloody nose, and a lot of bruises. The police arrested the four boys and took them away. They said they were looking for these guys, as reports were coming in about car break-ins and asked Ralph what had happened.

He told the police that when he pulled up he saw the boys trying to break into the cars parked out front. He yelled at them to stop, thinking they would run away, and that's when they attacked him. The police took everyone's statements, and they wanted Ralph to go to the hospital. He said it looked worse than it was and that he would be alright. I took him into the house to clean him up, and once we cleaned away the blood he didn't look to bad. He was shaken up and very sore and said, "It's a good thing you came out when you did, or I would be a lot worse."

Everyone showed their concern for him, and my dad wanted to make sure he was really alright. After my dad looked him over, he said that this was a heck of a way to finally meet him, and we all laughed.

Some of the guests were so grateful and thanked Ralph for stopping the boys from breaking into their cars, but they were sorry he got beat up. One man even tried to give Ralph \$20

for stopping the break-in, as all of his family's gifts were in the trunk of his car.

Ralph said, "No. Thank you. Have a Merry Christmas."

My dad told me he was very impressed by Ralph's actions and was sorry it turned out the way it did.

Everyone tried to get back into the holiday mood, and soon, the party was rolling again. We were having a good time, and people kept checking in on Ralph. His bruises were coming out more and more as the night went on. He made a big impression on my family and on the guests, as it seemed that he saved Christmas for a few of the families. No one stayed too late that night, as tomorrow was the big day.

After everyone left, I helped my mom clean up and went off to bed.

Before I fell asleep, I got my nightly goodnight text from Ralph.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

A Wonderful Holiday Season

Christmas morning was finally here, and we all sat around the tree opening our gifts. We were all happy with our presents, and my dad was doing his usual, making us pose and snapping pictures. Mom made breakfast, and we sat around the table eating and talking about the events from the night before. Soon, we had to leave the kitchen, so Mom could start making the traditional holiday feast. My grandparents were coming over for dinner, and we always looked forward to this family time and sharing this wonderful meal.

I got a shower and was getting ready for the day when Ralph called and asked if he could stop by this afternoon. I happily said yes, and I couldn't wait to see him. When he got here, I was shocked. When I opened the door as all of the bruises from last night came out in various shades of purple and blue. He still had a swollen lip, but he started to laugh at the look on my face. He said he was still very sore, but it

looked much worse than it really was. He told me that when his mom saw him, she was afraid he had reverted back to his old ways, but he assured her that was not the case. He told her what happened, and she said she was very proud of him.

We exchanged gifts and he said he liked the cologne I bought him, and he gave me a gold chain with a little heart pendant. I was surprised at such a beautiful gift, and I loved it. He was pleased that I put it right on and showed my mom. We sat around and talked while eating some snacks left over from the party the night before. He noticed how happy I was with my new necklace as I kept touching it to make sure it was still there. He even sat and watched some football with my dad, but soon, he said he had to leave. My mom asked him if he would like to stay for dinner, and he thanked her but said he wanted to spend some time with his family, as they had relatives coming to dinner, too.

I walked him to the door and gave him a soft little kiss on his cheek, as I didn't want to hurt his swollen lip. I told him Merry Christmas and thanked him for the beautiful gift. He left with a big grin on his face and seemed really happy. I was surprised at how happy and giddy I was for the rest of the day. It felt nice to have Ralph in my life. We had a great dinner and a nice evening with our family, but the time went way to fast. Before I knew it, everyone was getting ready to leave. We said our goodbyes with the usual hugs and kisses, and I helped my mom clean up.

I was getting ready for bed when Ralph called. He was very excited, and he said he told his family about me, and they would like to meet me sometime soon. He said he would like to set it up for tomorrow night, if that was okay with me. I said, "Sure that's fine," but now it was my turn to be nervous

since the last time I saw them was in the court room the year before. He told me they wanted to meet the person who had such an impact on all of their lives, and that made me even more nervous!

But I said okay. So it was a date.

Again, at the end of the night, I got my goodnight text.

The next night, Ralph picked me up at 7:00, and off we went to meet his family. He could see that I was nervous and said not to worry; everything would be alright. When we got there, I calmed down a little, seeing how excited his little brother and sister were to meet me. They had to show me all of their new Christmas gifts and wanted me to play with them. His parents were very nice, but our first meeting was a little awkward. However, we soon warmed up to each other. They asked about the Bully Patrol and said that they heard great things had come from it. They said what we have accomplished was pretty awesome and to keep up the good work. I thanked them and told them it was a team effort, and, “The team keeps getting bigger and better!”

His little sister did not leave my side the whole time I was there, and she cried when we left. I promised I would come back to see her soon, and that seemed to make her feel better. All and all, the night went well.

On the way back to my house, Ralph said he was glad I came to meet his family, and he thought it went well. He dropped me off and gave me a little goodnight kiss on the cheek, and we said goodnight.

He did text me later for our official goodnight, as always.

The rest of the week went flying by, and before I knew it, it was New Year’s Eve. Emily’s parents said we could all come

over their house to ring in the New Year. She invited some of her new friends and even some boys along with us girls. I asked Ralph if he would like to go, and he said sure. His bruises had almost faded, and he was turning into his handsome self again.

We ate snacks, listened to music, and played charades and Family Feud. The night flew by, and we all had a lot of fun. Her mom came in and turned on the TV, so we could watch the ball drop at midnight in Times Square. We were all running around yelling “Happy New Year!” kissing and hugging each other. When Ralph came over to me, I stood in front of him and gave him a little kiss on the cheek. He reached down and put both of his hands on my cheeks and pulled me towards him and gave me a real kiss. This was the first time I was ever kissed like that, and I felt all tingly inside and very happy. I really liked it, and I began to realize how much I was starting to like him.

We soon left the party and made our way home. Ralph drove me home and walked me to the front door. He leaned down and gave me another long kiss and said that he really liked me, and if we continued dating, would I agree to only see each other? I agreed and told him there was no one else I wanted to date. He said he was happy with that, and he felt the same. I felt like I was on cloud nine and went to bed feeling very happy and giddy again.

Later, I got my usual goodnight text.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Back to the Grind

The holiday season had come to an end. It was wonderful and also quite eventful, but now, it was time to get back to our regular routines, going back to school, the Bully Patrol, and of course, our martial arts classes. We still had a lot of work to do to prepare for our upcoming Black Belt test in the spring. We also still helped out with the beginner classes when we could, so we were very busy. Julia and I both had boyfriends, and the other girls started dating as well, which meant we didn't have much time to spare, but we still managed to get it all done and keep our grades up.

Ralph was true to his word and joined the beginner class. He was a quick learner and picked it up fast. He worked really hard, and soon, he was ready to test for his yellow belt. He made a joke saying he wanted to be able to hold his own, so his girlfriend didn't have to fight his battles, and we laughed. He did very well and was pleased with himself when he passed the test. He was very busy, too, with school, his job, and now his martial arts classes, so we didn't get to see as much of each

other as we would like, but we always made a little time for each other, even if we only spent some time stopping by each other's house for a little while. Or sometimes we would even babysit his little brother and sister, so his parents could go out. Right now, our lives were a little hectic to say the least.

The girls and I decided to put some extra time in at the Dojo to get ready for our Black Belt test, which was rapidly approaching. On Saturday, we spent the whole afternoon there practicing and had a really good workout. When I got home, I jumped right in the shower to get ready for my date that night. As I was drying off, my necklace got caught in the towel. I gave it a gentle tug and heard something snap. I quickly took it off, thinking I broke it, and to my surprise saw that the heart opened up, and inside, the words *I Love You* were engraved. I wore it all this time and never knew it opened.

I stood in the bathroom shocked and got that warm tingly feeling inside, which made my blush. Ralph never told me there was a message inside, but let me find out for myself. I didn't know how I was going to react tonight when I saw him.

He picked me up at 6:30, and we went to the movies. He noticed I was a little more quiet than usual, and every time I looked at him, I blushed a little. He thought that something was wrong. After the movie, we went to get some ice cream, and as we were eating, he had a concerned look on his face and asked me what was wrong. I reached up and snapped open the heart, and now, he started to blush, too.

He swallowed hard and said, "I was wondering when you were going to figure that out," then grabbed my hand. I told him how it happened and looked down a little embarrassed, and when I looked back up at him, he had the most tender

look on his face. I melted. He said he hoped that someday I would feel the same way, and I told him, "I think I already do."

We finished our ice cream and started for home. The tension was gone, and we talked happily all the way home. We pulled up out front of my house, and he leaned over to kiss me goodnight. I walked up to the door and turned around to watch him drive away, thinking how lucky I was to have such a great guy in my life.

My goodnight text came a little later, and I drifted off to sleep a very happy girl.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Ready or Not! The Big Day Is Here

Well, the big day was finally here. All of the anticipation and the hard work we did, and it soon would be over. We all put in so much time and really worked so hard for this and felt we were ready, but we were still nervous.

We met at our Dojo and Master D. took us to where we were being tested. We were not the only ones there, as many other students from different Dojo's were also being tested for various Black Belt degrees. Master D. tried to calm us down before the test began, as he saw how excited we were getting. He said he felt we were well prepared both physically and mentally to pass this difficult test. He said the judges would be strict, but he was confident we would all do well, and he told us to remember to breath and relax.

The judges came out and took their places, which signaled they were ready to begin. We took our places on the floor to perform our katas as a group. We had to perform each colored

belt kata from white to black. We had to know the historical name and meaning of each kata, how many moves were in each kata, and the meaning of each colored belt. Then we had to perform our self-defense techniques and spar with another student. When we were finished, we patiently waited for the rest of the testing to be completed. I looked over at Master D., and he had a big smile on his face and gave me a thumbs up. That helped me to relax a little, but the anticipation of waiting for the results was driving us crazy.

The judges left the room to talk it over and make their decisions. When they returned, they again took their places and started to make the announcements. They called us each up individually to let us know if we passed or failed. A few did not pass, and they called them up first to explain what they needed to work on in order to pass the next time. The rest of us were then called up one by one. They bowed to each of us and offered us congratulations, and we received a certificate and our newly earned Black Belt. We all walked away with big grins on our faces, and some even had tears in their eyes, as we were so proud of ourselves for achieving this accomplishment.

When we got back to our Dojo, to our surprise, many of the students, parents, and our families were all there. Master D. threw us a party, not only to celebrate receiving our Black Belts, but to also thank us for helping out in our Dojo. He said he usually didn't do this, but he wanted to let us know the impact we made, not only to his martial arts classes, but also to our community. That through the Bully Patrol, we made kids and adults aware that no one needed to tolerate being bullied and that they should stand up for themselves and others and fight back.

The bullying policies in many schools had changed and became much more strictly enforced. The Bully Patrol was alive and well in our school, and many other schools were also adopting the program. The adults had also become more aware of the bullying going on in the school and throughout the community. They supported their kids in the effort to help stop this and also joined self-defense classes themselves, which helped strengthen our community. He went on to say he didn't think these five young women realized the impact and differences their actions have made in so many lives.

"For all of this I salute you," he said.

The applause was deafening, and the pride on our parents' faces made us feel good. Everyone ran up to us to offer their congratulations and shake our hands or pat us on the back. The response was overwhelming, and we didn't know how to act, so we just smiled and thanked them.

Just then, Ralph walked out of the crowd with a tender, loving look on his face and gave me a big hug. He whispered in my ear that he was the perfect example of how the Bully Patrol changed people's lives, and it was all because of me.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you think the Bully Patrol is a good idea? Explain why.
2. How do you think something like this would work at your school?
3. In the events of this story, is there anything you would have done differently? If so, which events, and why?
4. What do you think about the changes in Ralph?
5. Do you think that someone's home life has an effect on the person and how they act?
6. Do you think martial arts classes could actually make such a difference in someone's life? Explain why.