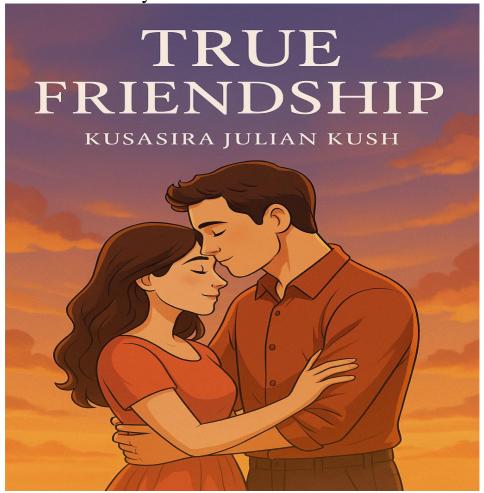
TRUE FRIENDSHIP

KUSASIRA JULIAN KUSH



TRUE FRIENDSHIP

By Kusasira Julian Kush



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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

Dedication

To every heart that has ever trusted a friend and found a soulmate.

To dreamers, believers, and the quiet strength of love that grows through storms.

Preface

This story was born out of the simple but powerful idea that true love often begins with true friendship. Through Clever and Adie's journey—from childhood friends to soulmates—the reader is invited to reflect on loyalty, forgiveness, passion, and the unpredictable nature of the heart.

It is my hope that as you read their story, you will laugh, cry, and most importantly, believe in the timeless beauty of love that grows from trust.

About the Author

Kusasira Julian Kush is a passionate storyteller whose writing blends emotion, romance, and real-life inspiration. 'True Friendship' is her debut romantic novel, drawn from the powerful bonds of trust and growth that blossom from friendship.

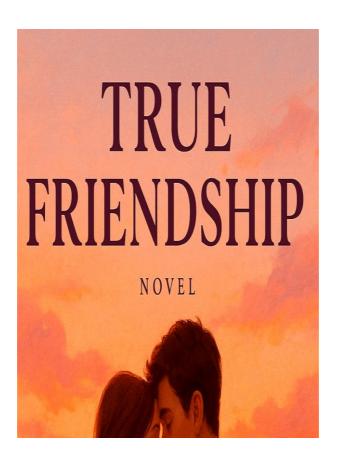


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Chapter One: The Boy Behind the Classroom



The sun was soft that afternoon, casting warm golden shadows across the grassy school compound. I'd had a rough morning, one of those days where even the teachers seemed annoyed at your existence. So instead of heading straight to the noisy dining hall for lunch, I took the longer route behind the classroom blocks—my secret place to breathe. Then I heard it. A sound that didn't belong there. Crying.

I turned the corner cautiously and spotted a boy crouched beside the old wall. His knees drawn to his chest, his head buried in his arms, shoulders trembling.

I hesitated. Should I walk away? But something in me wouldn't let me.

"Hey..." I said softly, walking toward him. He flinched and quickly wiped his eyes. "Sorry. Didn't mean for anyone to see."

"You don't have to apologize for feeling," I replied, sitting beside him. "What happened?"
He gave a sniff. "The older boys teased me again.
Said I look like a baby goat in school uniform."

I chuckled before I could stop myself, and his eyes widened. "I—I'm sorry," I said, covering my mouth. "It's just... you really don't."

He blinked. Then, slowly, he smiled. "Thanks... I guess."

"I'm Clever," I said, offering my hand.

He shook it gently. "Adie."

"Nice to meet you, Adie. Now, how about we stop hiding and go conquer some posho and beans together?"

He chuckled. "You're weird."

"And you're crying behind a building," I said, standing up. "Let's go be weird together."

We walked side by side back toward the crowd, a quiet breeze between us.

That was the beginning.

Chapter Two: Neighbors and Secrets



From that day on, our friendship blossomed like wildfire in dry grass. We ate together, studied together, and found ways to turn even the dullest moments into fun. When the school ran out of sugar for porridge, we shared sweets from my bag. When the headmaster gave surprise tests, we exchanged glances across the room and made silly faces. But the real surprise came after school one day. "Let me walk you to the junction," Adie said, swinging his bag over his shoulder.

I didn't argue. We walked, talking about cartoon shows, favorite meals, and who we thought would pass the math test. As we reached the junction, I turned left—and so did he.

I stopped. "You live this way?"

"Yeah. Third lane, yellow gate."

I stared at him. "Adie! You live just three houses from mine!"

"No way!"

We laughed until we almost fell into the ditch.
From that moment, everything changed.
We started doing homework together under the

mango tree near his gate. We played music, danced like fools, and sneaked bites from his mum's

cooking. Sometimes, I'd stay until it was dark and the stars were blinking awake. Sometimes, I stayed the night.

One evening, I woke up to find him asleep beside me on the living room couch, our arms barely touching. I should have moved. But I didn't.

Instead, I watched him sleep for a few seconds longer than I should have.

Chapter Three: The Four of Us

When secondary school began, we met **Shallot**—a confident, cheeky girl who wore her opinion like perfume: strong and impossible to ignore. She quickly claimed her place beside us.

"I swear, you two are like an old married couple," she teased one day. "Let me spice up this friendship." Along with Shallot came her best friend **Adellah**— the opposite of her in every way. Soft-spoken, sweet, and always with a notebook in hand, Adellah seemed like she'd stepped out of a poem.

Together, we became a team—inseparable and unforgettable.

We had our traditions. Fridays were for prank wars. Saturdays, we'd sneak into the fields near the river and pretend we were explorers. Once, we tied up a note in a bottle and threw it into the water.



"If it comes back," Adie said, "it means destiny wants us to always be together."

Shallot rolled her eyes. "Or maybe the river just has bad taste."

We laughed, but I remembered Adie's words long after.

As the years passed, I noticed how his voice grew deeper, how his laughter stirred something different in me. I told myself it was just friendship.

But I began to notice when Shallot touched his arm for too long. Or when Adellah smiled at him a little too brightly.

And it started to hurt.

Chapter Four: Campus Vibes and Butterflies

We all got admitted to Straiden University. When I saw Adie in a suit for the first time during orientation, my heart did something strange—like it jumped, tripped, and then laughed at itself. Life at university was loud, exciting, and terrifying. But with Adie by my side, everything felt manageable.

We shared early morning walks to lectures, ice cream after exams, and movie nights in the common room. One evening, he leaned in close to whisper a joke during a boring seminar. I didn't hear the joke. I was too focused on how close his lips were to my cheek.

One day, I found him waiting for me outside my dorm with flowers.

"Why?" I asked, blushing.

He shrugged. "You looked sad yesterday. I thought... maybe flowers would make you smile again."



And they did.

The more time we spent together, the harder it was to ignore the shift between us. His gaze lingered longer. His hugs held warmth they didn't used to. When he smiled, it felt like the sun chose only me to shine on. One Saturday, Shallot suggested we go clubbing at Nick Club.

"You two need to dance! Shake off those academic cobwebs!" she teased.

That night changed everything.

We danced.

We laughed.

We drank too much.

And at one point, in the middle of the dance floor, Adie looked into my eyes and everything else faded.

"I love this song," I whispered.

"I love... you," he murmured.

I thought I didn't hear him right.

But later, when we stumbled into a quiet corner, then into a room, and then into each other's arms... I didn't need confirmation.

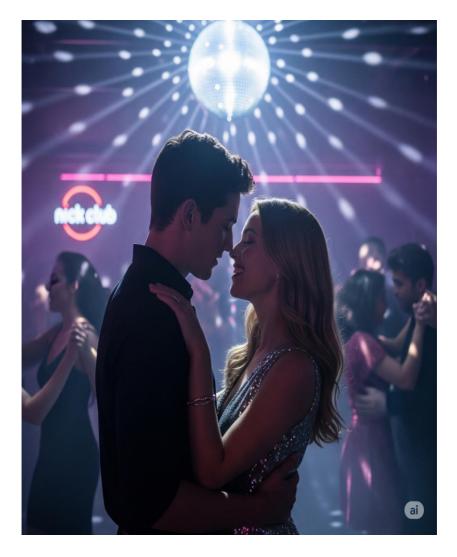
And in the morning, when I woke up in his bed, tangled in his sheets, I stared at the ceiling in disbelief.

"What have I done?" I whispered. He stirred beside me and smiled. "You were amazing."

I covered my face. "Please tell me nothing happened." He leaned in, kissed my shoulder. "Everything happened. And I'm glad it did." That's when I knew I was in love.

Hopelessly, truly, painfully in love.

Chapter Five: A Night Like No Other



Campus nights had a rhythm of their own—music floating through dorm windows, whispers and laughter under the stars, the occasional guitar echoing from a lonely balcony. But that night, the air felt different. Charged. Alive.

We'd just gotten back from Nick Club, tipsy on soda and stolen glances. I could still feel the beat of the last song pulsing through my chest, and Adie's arm around my waist lingered like a secret.

He unlocked his room door and flicked on the light.

"You want water?" he asked, his voice low.

I nodded, barely trusting myself to speak.

The room was small, warm, scented faintly with his cologne and the soft spice of cinnamon from the cookies he always kept on his shelf. I sat on the bed, heart pounding in my throat. My skin tingled everywhere he had touched me while we danced. He handed me a glass of water. Our fingers brushed. Electricity.

"You okay?" he asked, kneeling in front of me.

"I don't know," I whispered. "I feel like... everything is spinning."

He looked into my eyes, those deep, gentle eyes.

"Then hold on to me."

I didn't answer.

I didn't need to.

Because he leaned in.

And I met him halfway.

The kiss was slow, hesitant, like the first raindrop before a storm. Then it deepened—soft lips exploring, testing, memorizing. He wrapped his arms around me, and suddenly I wasn't scared anymore. I was floating.

We fell back on the bed, laughing breathlessly. He traced a finger down my arm, sending goosebumps in its wake.

"Are we crossing a line?" I murmured.

"We already have," he said. "And I don't want to go back."

That night, we didn't need music.

Our hearts made their own rhythm.

Chapter Six: The Morning After

Light streamed through the curtains like golden silk. I opened my eyes slowly, greeted by the unfamiliar ceiling above me. Then I felt it—warmth beside me.



I turned.

Adie lay there, shirtless, his face peaceful. He looked younger somehow, like a boy who had finally stopped running.

And then I saw our clothes scattered on the floor.

My heart skipped.

What did we do?

I sat up too fast, pulling the sheet over my chest. "Adie..." I whispered, shaking him gently. "Adie,

wake up."

He stirred, blinked, then smiled. "Morning, sunshine."

"Don't sunshine me!" I hissed. "Did we...?"

He sat up and rubbed his eyes. "Clever, you don't remember?"

I stared at him, panic blooming.

He took my hand. "You were amazing. It was... beautiful."

My stomach dropped. "I—Adie, I thought we were just..."

"Friends?" he said, voice suddenly sharp.

I didn't know what to say. My heart felt like it was tearing in two.

"I'm sorry," I whispered. "I didn't mean for it to happen like this."

He looked away. "Well, it did. And I don't regret it." I stood, gathering my clothes. "I need to think." "Think about what?" he asked, his voice barely a whisper. "About whether what we shared was real... or just a mistake?" I didn't answer. Because I didn't know.

Chapter Seven: Shallot's Secret

The next few days passed in a blur. Adie didn't text. I didn't call.

We smiled at each other in public but spoke with our eyes. A storm was growing.

It finally broke when Shallot cornered me at the canteen.



"So," she said, folding her arms. "You and Adie, huh?"

I froze. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, come on," she smirked. "The way he looks at you? I've known for months."

I looked down. "It... wasn't planned."

She leaned closer, voice low. "You know I liked him, right?"

I looked up, shocked. "Shallot..."

"I told you once in Senior Four," she hissed. "You laughed it off. And now you're sleeping in his bed?" My face burned. "It wasn't like that."

"Of course it was," she snapped. "You always take things without realizing it."

Her words cut deep.

"But guess what," she said, stepping back. "He'll get bored of you. And when he does, don't come running."

That night, I cried in Adellah's lap.

She stroked my hair gently. "You didn't do anything wrong by falling in love."

"I feel like I did."

"Then make it right. Not for her. For yourself."

Chapter Eight: Adie's Dilemma



Adie sat alone on the edge of the campus basketball court, his elbows resting on his knees, eyes lost in a swirl of thoughts. The air was cool, laced with the distant hum of student chatter and the thump of a bouncing ball in the background.

He held his phone, thumb hovering over my contact name.

Clever.

Just the name made his chest tighten.

We hadn't spoken properly since that night.

"Bro, you okay?"

It was his roommate, Eli.

Adie blinked out of his trance. "Yeah... just thinking."

Eli sat beside him and gave him a knowing look.

"You're thinking about her, aren't you?"

Adie didn't reply.

Eli sighed. "You love her. Everyone sees it. Even Shallot sees it, and she's pretending not to care."

"I'm scared," Adie muttered. "What if it was too soon? What if she regrets it?"

"Do you regret it?"

Adie looked away. "No. Not a single second."

Eli stood. "Then go fight for her. Because real love doesn't happen twice. And Clever... she's worth everything."

That night, Adie didn't sleep.

Instead, he wrote me a letter he never sent.

"Clever,

That night... you made the stars jealous. I saw you in a way I've never seen anyone before. Vulnerable. Beautiful. Mine.

I want more than just memories. I want mornings with you. Midnight walks. A lifetime of laughing at stupid things.

But I'll wait... even if it hurts.

— Adie."

Chapter Nine: Enter Shylock

I met **Shylock** on a Thursday afternoon, three weeks after that night. I was sitting alone under the fig tree near the campus café, drawing hearts in the dust with a stick like a lovesick idiot.

"You planning to plant something there?"



I looked up.

He was tall, dark-skinned, with a cheeky grin that made his eyes dance. His bag hung off one shoulder, and he had this effortless confidence that made people turn when he walked.

"Sorry?" I asked.

"The ground," he said, pointing at my stick. "You've been stabbing it like it owes you money."

I laughed despite myself. "Just... thinking."

"Dangerous sport," he said, dropping beside me.

"Mind if I join?"

From that day, Shylock and I became friends.

He had a way of making heavy things feel lighter.

He made me laugh. He listened. He never judged.

One day, he caught me staring at a couple holding hands.

"You still love him, don't you?" he asked gently. I nodded.

"Then stop pretending to smile," he said. "Either fight for him or let him go. But don't torture yourself in between."

I looked into his eyes. "Do you always give such good advice?"

He grinned. "Only to pretty girls who need it."

Chapter Ten: The Rain Kiss

It was a Friday evening. Dark clouds had rolled in, thunder mumbling in the distance. I was walking back from the library, no umbrella, no jacket, when the sky finally cracked and released a downpour. I started running.

Then I saw him — standing by the faculty block, soaked to the bone.

Adie.

He looked up and saw me. Neither of us moved. I froze, breathing hard.

He stepped forward.

"Clever—"

"I'm sorry," I said, my voice catching. "I ran away when I should've stayed. I was scared, Adie." The rain plastered my hair to my face. His eyes were locked on mine, stormy and searching.

"I don't want perfect," I whispered. "I just want *you*." He didn't speak.

He kissed me instead.



Right there, under the rain, in the middle of campus. His hands cradled my face, my fingers tangled in his shirt, and for a moment, the world didn't exist. There was no Shallot. No regret. No fear.

Only us.

Only that kiss.

That perfect, shattering, slow-burning kiss.

Chapter Eleven: A Weekend for Two



Adie planned it as a surprise.

A weekend at his cousin's countryside cottage — just the two of us, fresh air, no distractions.

"Think of it as a restart," he said.

I agreed.

The cottage was beautiful. Wooden floors, stone fireplace, a small balcony that overlooked a lake.

That first night, we cooked together — or tried to. I spilled the rice, he burned the chicken. We ended up ordering chapati from a boda guy.

We danced barefoot in the kitchen to old love songs.

We played cards in bed, laughing over silly bets.

We took a long walk by the lake, where he picked a flower and tucked it behind my ear.

And when the stars came out, we lay under a blanket and talked.

"Do you think... this is real?" I asked.

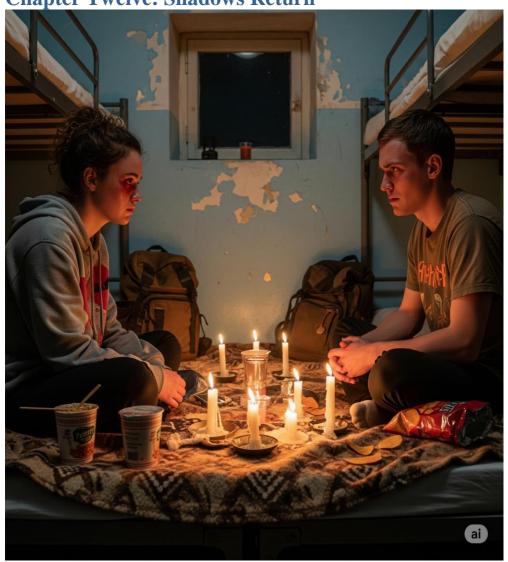
He turned to me. "Clever, if this is a dream, I never want to wake up."

His lips brushed mine, gentle and slow, and the world tilted.

That night, in the safety of warm sheets and whispered I-love-yous, we made love again. This time, it wasn't messy or confusing.

It was everything.

Chapter Twelve: Shadows Return



The weekend with Adie felt like a dream I never wanted to end. But reality has a way of pulling you back.

Monday morning hit hard.

As I walked into the lecture hall, I heard a familiar voice behind me.

"Still pretending you're the innocent one?" I turned slowly.

Shallot stood there, arms crossed, lips twisted in a smirk that didn't reach her eyes.

"I don't want to fight," I said calmly.

"Too bad," she snapped. "Because I've been fighting myself ever since I saw you with him. Every time I look at you, I wonder how long you were lying to me."

"We were never a *thing*, Shallot," I said quietly. "You liked him. I loved him. There's a difference."

She stepped closer. "And when he leaves you for someone else, I hope you remember how easily he replaced friendship with lust."

My face stung like I'd been slapped.

Adellah stepped between us. "That's enough, Shallot. You're hurting too, but this isn't the way."

Shallot scoffed and walked away.

Adellah turned to me. "She'll heal. But you have to stop blaming yourself for choosing your heart." I nodded.

But deep down, a part of me still felt broken.

Chapter Thirteen: The Green-Eyed Moment



Shylock and I were walking across campus one evening when Adie saw us.

We were laughing. He was holding my bag because my shoulder had cramped. It was harmless.

But Adie didn't know that.

Later that night, I got a call.

"So... you and Shylock?" he asked, trying to sound casual. But his voice was tight.

I sighed. "You know he's just a friend."

"Is he?" Adie asked. "Because he looks at you like he's waiting for something."

I was silent.

He continued, "Sometimes I feel like... you're still running. And I'm just here hoping I can catch up." My heart ached. "Adie, I'm not going anywhere. I chose you. Every day, I wake up and choose you." He was quiet for a long moment.

Then: "Then let's stop walking in circles."

Chapter Fourteen: The Anniversary Plan



Adie had always been creative, but this time he outdid himself.

"Meet me where we first talked," his message said. I followed the instructions, wearing a simple dress and my nervous smile.

Behind the old classroom block, he'd transformed the space.

Fairy lights strung between trees, photos of our journey clipped on twine. A picnic blanket with soft pillows. Soft music from a speaker tucked into the grass.

He stood there, holding a flower—not roses, but sunflowers. My favorite.

"You remembered," I whispered.

"I remember everything about you," he said, stepping closer.

We sat. We talked. We laughed about our first fight, our first kiss, our silly dance moves.

Then he handed me a small box.

My heart raced.

"I know we're young," he said. "But when I look at you, I see forever. Not perfect. Just... true." He opened the box.

Inside wasn't a ring.

It was a **bracelet** with a small silver charm engraved with "Us, always."

"Someday, there'll be a ring," he said. "But today, I promise to never let you go."

I put it on, and my hands trembled.

Then I kissed him.

Slow.

Deep.

Right there, in our memory garden.

Chapter Fifteen: Fireflies and Forever



Later that evening, we lay on the blanket, hands entwined.

Fireflies danced above us like floating stars.

Adie turned to me. "If you could be anywhere in the world right now, where would you be?"

"Here," I said. "Exactly here. With you."

He smiled. "Good. Because I don't plan on letting you go."

I sat up and kissed his neck, my fingers tracing down his chest. "Then prove it."

His breath hitched.

The kiss deepened. His hands slid around my waist, pulling me into his lap.

We didn't rush. Every touch was slow, deliberate.

The kind of love that burns like candlelight—soft, warm, lasting.

I whispered his name between kisses.

He whispered mine like a prayer.

And under the moonlight, we loved each other again—not out of passion alone, but trust.

When we fell asleep in each other's arms, it wasn't lust.

It was home.

Chapter Sixteen: Rain, Roses, and Realizations

Rain tapped against my window like a melody calling my name. I sat staring out at the grey sky when my phone buzzed.

Shallot: Can we talk?

I didn't reply immediately. My heart wasn't ready, but maybe... maybe healing didn't wait for the heart to be ready.

We met at the school garden—the same one where we'd once planted sunflowers in our first year.

She stood there, arms folded, face unreadable.

"I was cruel to you," she said without preamble.

"Because I was hurting. Not just because I liked him... but because I lost *you*."

Tears welled in my eyes.

"I miss being your friend," she whispered.

I stepped forward and hugged her, tightly. "Then let's stop being strangers."

We stood there, two wounded girls choosing forgiveness in the rain.



Chapter Seventeen: The Goodbye That Wasn't



Shylock found me near the campus gate a few days later.

"Leaving already?" I asked.

He smiled. "Just a holiday. But I wanted to see you before I go."

I nodded. There was silence.

"I meant what I said," he finally said. "You're unforgettable, Clever. But I know your heart belongs to someone else."

"I'm sorry if I—"

"You didn't," he interrupted. "You never misled me. You just glowed too brightly, and I stood too close." We both laughed softly.

Then he reached into his pocket and pulled out a notebook.

"Write your story. All of it. Don't just *live* it.

Remember it."

I hugged him. "I will."

And I meant it.

Chapter Eighteen: A Love Worth Fighting For

Meeting Adie's parents was terrifying.

Mr. Rukundo had the stern face of a military general and the silent judgment of a high court judge. Mrs. Rukundo, on the other hand, watched me with thoughtful eyes.

"Are you serious about our son?" she asked finally, voice gentle but direct.

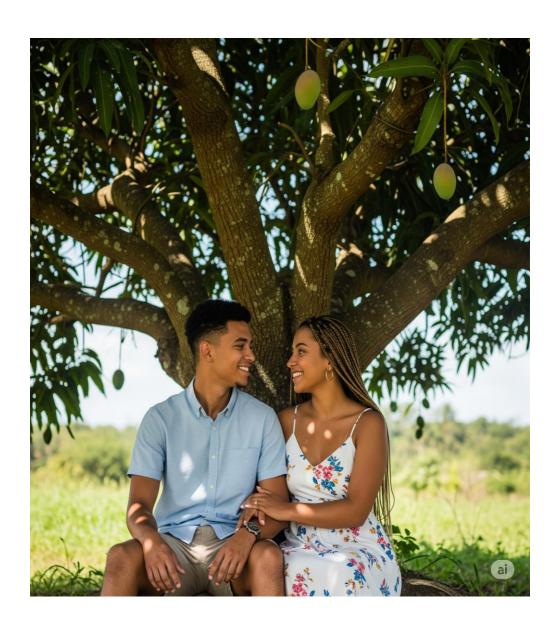
"I love him," I said simply. "Not for who I hope he becomes. For who he is."

She nodded. Mr. Rukundo grunted.

Then, slowly, they began to warm up. Over cups of tea and stories of our childhood, walls began to crumble.

Later, Adie whispered in my ear, "They've never liked anyone before."

I smiled. "Guess I'm just unforgettable."



Chapter Nineteen: The Proposal

It was the last night before campus break. Adie told me to wear something nice, but comfortable.

He blindfolded me.

When he took it off, I gasped.

We were in the same spot where we had our first dance—the open-air rooftop above the library. Fairy lights.

Soft music.

All our closest friends, even Shallot and Shylock, waiting in silence.

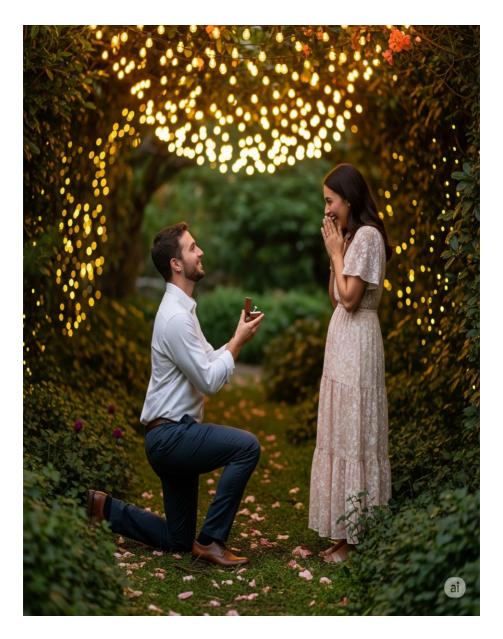
Adie took my hands.

"You made me believe that love wasn't just a fairy tale," he said. "You were the friend I didn't know I needed. And then you became the girl I couldn't live without."

He got on one knee.

The world stopped.

"Clever... will you marry me?"



Tears spilled down my cheeks. "Yes. A million times yes!"

Cheers erupted. Confetti exploded.

And in the middle of it all, he kissed me like he had a thousand times before—but this time, it meant forever.

Chapter Twenty: The Power of True Friendship

Months passed.

We graduated.

We moved in together.

We fought, we made up, we learned to love not just the best parts of each other—but also the flaws.

Shallot started her own business and called me her "sister-wife-in-spirit."

Shylock published a book.

Adellah got engaged.

And Adie and I?

We wrote our story in kisses and candlelight, Sunday breakfasts and spontaneous road trips.

One day, while holding our newborn daughter, Adie whispered in my ear, "We named her **Hope**, because that's what you gave me."

I kissed his cheek.

Because that's what love is.

Not perfect.

But true.

And that's all I ever needed.



Glossary

Nallia Village: The hometown of Clever and Adie; a symbol of roots, history, and full-circle love.

Straiden University: The campus where friendships deepen, conflicts erupt, and love blooms.

Nick Club: The dance club where Clever and Adie's relationship takes a passionate turn.

Us, Always Charm: A bracelet Adie gifts Clever, symbolizing eternal devotion.

Shylock's Tree: The fig tree on campus where new friendships began and emotional turning points occurred.

Sunflowers: Clever's favorite flower, often used by Adie to express silent affection and happiness.

Index

Main Characters

Clever – Narrator and protagonist; evolves from a selfless friend to a strong, loving partner.

Adie – Clever's childhood friend turned lover; gentle, sincere, and deeply committed.

Shallot – Former best friend whose jealousy turns into maturity and reconciliation.

Shylock – A charming friend who helps Clever through emotional confusion with grace.

Adellah – The calm voice of reason and emotional stability throughout the journey.

Core Themes

True Friendship – Not just between lovers, but among all who chose each other through love and hardship.

Forgiveness – Key to healing betrayal and growing love.

Growth and Change – Every character matures emotionally through loss, love, and reflection.

Romantic Destiny – Love that starts as friendship and becomes a lifelong bond.

Emotional Intimacy – Romantic connection expressed through shared memories, not just physical affection.

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

First of all I would like to say a hello and say that you are doing good, you people who try to the best in making friendships shine.

Keep the love. May God bless you!