



# The Heir of Infinity

By karthik Nethala

Zay wasn't born into this family, but he was born for it. From the day he arrived, he and his new sister, Elara, were inseparable. They filled the quiet house with laughter, chasing each other through hallways and sharing secrets under the stars. They were two halves of a single, joyful soul.



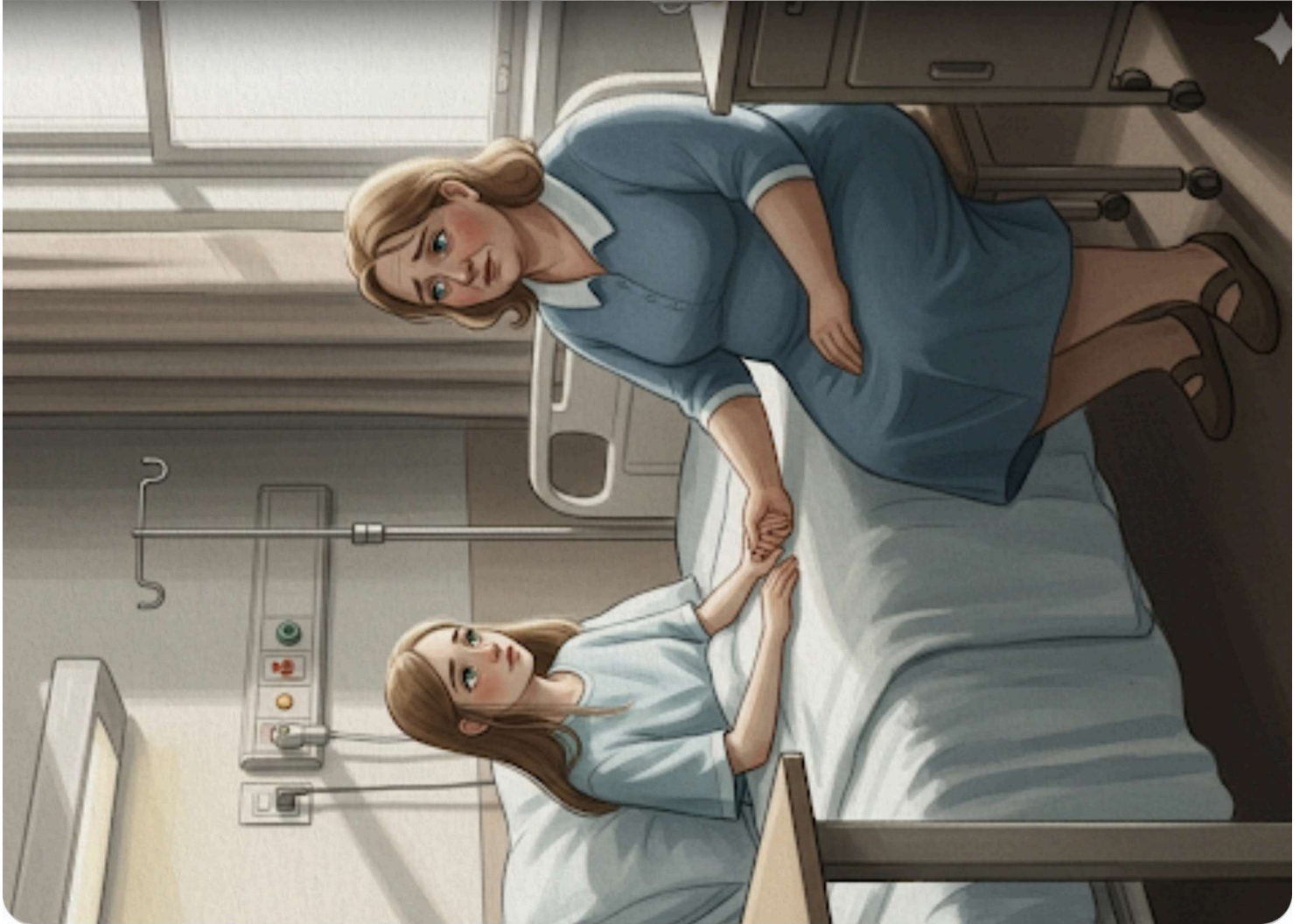


Years passed in a happy blur. Zay, now twenty, and Elara, seventeen, still shared that same bond. He would help her with her art, and she would listen for hours as he spoke of his dreams. Their parents watched them, their hearts full, believing this perfect peace would last forever.





But forever is a fragile thing. The laughter in the house began to fade, replaced by hushed whispers and the sterile scent of medicine. A sickness, cruel and swift, had taken root in Elara. It was a final-stage disease, the doctors said, a shadow that no light could seem to pierce.



Zay spent every moment he could by her side. He read to her, told her stories of the outside world, and promised her they would see the stars together again. But with each passing day, her light grew dimmer, and the hope in his heart grew heavier. The medicine that could save her was a world away, a treasure they could not afford.





On the last night, the air in the room was thick with unspoken goodbyes. Elara's hand, frail and cool, reached for his. In her palm was a simple silver watch. "This is my gift to you, Zay," she whispered, her voice a thread of sound. "Remember me."



Tears streamed down her face. "I'm sorry for being a burden. I was so happy when you came into my life... but now this... They say that gifting a watch means the person won't be in your life, but I want to be in yours, Zay. I want to stay." Zay took the watch, his own tears blurring her face into a pale, beautiful light.





He went home, but sleep would not come. The watch felt cold against his skin, each tick a countdown to a world without her. He sat by his window, staring at the moon, a solitary silver coin in a black velvet sky. The silence of the house was a crushing weight.





A sudden crash from downstairs shattered the quiet. Shouts echoed, sharp and violent. Zay's blood ran cold. He crept to the landing and saw them—three figures in shimmering golden suits, their faces hidden by polished masks. They cornered his parents in the foyer. "The timepiece," the leader's voice rasped, metallic and cold. "Give it to us."





His father stood his ground. "Get out of my house!" The answer was a flash of brutal, silent movement. Zay watched in horror as his parents fell, their fight for their son ending in an instant. The golden figures turned, their blank masks fixing on him. The leader pointed. "The watch. Now."





They lunged for him. Zay stumbled back, his arm striking the railing. The watch, Elara's last gift, flew from his wrist. It hit the floor with a sickening crack. At that exact moment, a bolt of lightning seemed to strike his mind. Agony, white-hot and blinding, tore through him. Flashes of a throne, a bloody crown marked with an infinity symbol, and a terrible accident flooded his vision. Below, the lead figure froze, his surprise cutting through the violence. "That's not... How can this be?"

