

“I’ll make a pretty necklace with the reddish one,” Annalise told little Toby.

Toby gazed up from the whirring rock tumbler to his full-grown sister. He’d daydreamed about *cool* rocks. He hadn’t considered they’d be *pretty*, too.

“No, the reddish one’s for my sword!” Toby said.

Then the doorbell rang. Annalise peered through the window and washed white. She stopped Toby from looking outside, so it mustn’t be Mom yet.

“Let’s play hide-and-seek.” Annalise’s smile contradicted reddish eyes.

“Hide well, okay?” Her words rushed. “Stay hidden until I find you.”

She counted fast, so Toby hid. He scrunched small between pots in the kitchen cupboard. When footsteps pattered, he stilled so pots wouldn’t clamor.

“You need to leave.” Annalise’s voice wavered.

“No, Annalise.” Mason’s voice heated Toby’s cheeks reddish. “I need *you*.”

Then, whimpers wove through unbridled clamor. “You’re hurting me!”

Toby imagined pots as armor. He could be her knight if only he had his sword.

A thud stopped Toby’s breath.

“Get up,” demanded Mason.

Toby listened long with his eyes squeezed shut.

“This isn’t funny. Get up.”

Eternally after, the front door closed. Pots clamored when Toby crawled to Annalise. He nuzzled into her rhythm-absent chest.

“I’m sorry,” he said, then tears fell.

He wasn’t a knight.

“You can have the reddish one,” he sobbed. The rock tumbler stopped whirring, amplifying the emptiness.

“Please. For your pretty necklace, Annalise. I’ll make it for you.”

And whenever she found him, he would give it to her. Someday.