

# **Dream Keeper**

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A Dream Team Novel

*Teaser Chapter*

**Prologue**

**Parent Trap**

**Auggie**

Auggie stood at the front of the church and watched her walk down the aisle.

The bridesmaids' dresses Lottie chose were very Lottie. Sleek. Sexy.

Baring.

All the women looked great in them, but none of them looked better than Pepper.

And he thought that even before Pepper, as she strutted down the aisle, caught sight of her daughter, Juno, and shot her girl a huge smile.

Pepper Hannigan was gorgeous.

Anytime she was with her daughter?

Knockout.

They were the next in the line of Lottie's matches.

Auggie and Pepper.

Mo and Lottie were the obvious firsts (Mo was one of Aug's four best buds), and Lottie earning the love of Mo had been all Lottie's idea.

Mo never thought he'd find anyone as fantastic as Lots, would never go for it, until Lottie talked him around.

Now Mo was standing at the front of their line, waiting to make her his wife.

Once Lottie got her happy ending, she set about giving the same thing to Mo's friends...fixing them up with her own crew.

And so far, she'd done a bang-up job.

Mag and Evie, the second couple, were living together and getting married.

Boone and Ryn, the third, were tight, and further, they were in business together.

Axl and Hattie, the fourth, were as good as living together, and practically inseparable.

It was him and Pepper who were the holdouts.

This was not for lack of trying on Auggie's part.

Once he'd met her, Auggie saw no reason not to go for it.

She was gorgeous. She was funny. She spoke her mind. She was laid back. Together. She didn't seem to have any hang-ups.

But Pepper saw reason not to give it a shot because she had a kid.

He got it. She was being careful. Whatever had torn her and Juno's dad apart had made her skittish.

So yeah.

He got it.

That didn't mean it wasn't torture.

Like right now, when her eyes caught his, the smile that she gave her kid still in them, and Auggie felt that.

He *felt* it.

Damn.

It wasn't even aimed at him in any real way, and that residual love she'd targeted at her daughter was so big, it took forever to fade away.

He'd never felt that kind of love.

Not once in his life.

And he wanted it so bad, the backs of his teeth hurt with the need to taste it.

He lost her attention when she shifted to take her place at the front of the church and Auggie tore his gaze away from her to watch the next woman, Hattie, march down the aisle.

On its way, his gaze snagged on Juno.

Dark hair to her mom's blonde, she was all dressed up, her hair curled—her mom was a bridesmaid in a big wedding with all the prep that entailed, but it was clear Juno had not been forgotten.

She was staring at her mother, beaming with pride.

Seeing that beam made Auggie want even more of what he'd never had.

From the both of them.

\* \* \* \*

“No one should enjoy this song that much,” Axl noted.

Auggie and his bud were sprawled in chairs next to a table that had a scattering of smeared cake plates, abandoned drinks, and a sprinkling of the personalized M&M's that had been Lots and Mo's wedding favors.

Lottie and Mo had taken off a couple of hours ago, but the party was not winding down in the slightest, which wasn't a surprise, considering the guest list was made up of Rock Chicks and their posse, and Dream Team and their crew.

Lottie and Mo might be long gone, taking off to go all night somewhere else.

But their wedding reception was going to kiss the dawn.

At least.

Case in point, it was after midnight, “Celebration” by Kool and the Gang was playing, and the dance floor was packed.

Callum Nightingale was the center of attention. To his mother and her friends egging him on (and his father and *his* friends standing on the sidelines shaking their heads, but grinning), Callum was actually breakdancing, and the kid rocked that shit.

But Auggie wasn't watching Callum.

He was watching Juno and Pepper goofing off.

No woman in a dress cut that low with a slit that high should be able to pull off acting that big of a dork.

But Juno had selected the air trumpet, and Pepper had decided on the air saxophone, and they were jamming *out*.

No stale air guitar or lead singer nonsense for those two adorable goofballs.

They were about the horns.

And they were having the time of their lives.

They were in the midst of a huge celebration, and still, they were a party of two.

Fuck, why did his gut ache?

“Aug?”

Auggie stopped watching Pepper and Juno singing “Yahoo!” into fake microphones while still holding on to their fake instruments and looked to his friend.

The minute he did, Axl’s head ticked, and he murmured, “Buddy.”

There you go.

He didn’t hide the ache.

Aug swallowed, turned his attention back to the dance floor, and focused on Luke Stark breaking up some situation happening with his daughter, Maisie, and Tack Allen’s son, Cutter.

“She’s still stonewalling you,” Axl guessed.

“Said it before, Axe. She’s got a kid. I get it. If you’re a mom,” *like Pepper was a mom*, he didn’t add, *not like my mom was a mom*, “you protect your kid.”

“She’ll get there,” Axl declared.

Auggie was beginning to doubt it.

“Seriously, man, she’ll get there,” Axl pressed.

Aug rolled his head on his shoulders and looked back to the dance floor, but not to Pepper and Juno, just the general wave and hum of happy people expressing that happiness physically.

Then he said, “If she doesn’t, she doesn’t.”

“She looks at you when you’re not looking at her, Aug, and when she does, she has the same expression on her face you just did.”

That got Axl Auggie’s full attention.

“No shit?” he asked.

Axl shook his head. “Would I shit you about that?”

No, he would not.

“You haven’t noticed it?” Axl asked.

He hadn’t.

Aug couldn’t stop it. His eyes shot right to Pepper.

And damn.

When they did, he caught her quickly looking away.

His gaze dropped to Juno.

She didn’t look away.

She was staring right at him, big grin, and when she got his attention, she waved.

He returned her smile and waved back.

The song changed to “Can’t Stop the Feeling!” and suddenly Hattie was in her man’s space.

“Babe, not gonna—” Axl started, right before she yanked him out of his chair.

“You too!” she pointed at Auggie as she dragged Axl to the dance floor.

She kept her eyes on him while waving at him to hurry it up even as she shoved her man where she wanted him to be.

That being among the dancers forming a big circle, and when Auggie noticed Pepper bending forward and pressing her hands between her knees, her mouth wide open with laughter, he got off his ass and joined the party.

When he did, he saw, in the middle of the circle, Smithie was cutting loose. And probably unsurprisingly, considering the man ran a club, he could bust a move.

Dorian joined his uncle in the circle, snapping his fingers and moving practically nothing but those and his shoulders. Even so, Ian ratcheted up the cool factor of this mess immeasurably. He was just that guy.

They faded out when Jagger and his woman, Archie, took Jag's little brother, Wilder, in, and Wilder did what the kid often did. He went wild.

But Archie's moves took cool to a place where it was hot.

Jagger's brother, Dutch, was dragged in by Dutch's girl, Georgie, and they crashed that particular party.

Bikers and their babes cutting a rug.

Only at a Dream Team wedding.

As the song carried on, it went like that with Lots's brother-in-law, Eddie Chavez, standing on a chair at the edge of the circle filming it on his phone, which was good.

Mo and Lottie were undoubtedly down with whatever they were doing right then.

But they wouldn't want to miss this.

It ended as it should.

Hattie heading out for a solo.

She'd lost the four-inch heels, and partly because she was classically trained, partly because she was Hattie, she pulled off something that was hip-hop, disco and classical ballet that had everyone hooting, shouting, catcalling and clapping, it was just that damned *awesome*.

But Aug stopped watching Hattie in order to watch Axl doing it.

And...

Auggie also wanted *that*.

Pride.

And lots of love.

Aug felt something which made him swing his head the other way to see Pepper glancing away again.

When he caught that, it wasn't the first time he did it that day.

It wasn't the first time he did it genuinely that day.

But it was the best one he'd felt that day.

He smiled.

\* \* \* \*

## **Pepper**

"She's got a talent with it," Auggie teased, his black eyes lit with a playful light as he gave guff to Ryn.

"I gotta admit, she does," Boone agreed on a mutter.

"Uh, becoming a gazillionaire flipper doesn't work if you buy a fabulous house that you maybe change a chandelier in," Ryn remarked. "The house needs to be a mess. A disaster. It



wouldn't be fun if it wasn't a challenge. So yeah, I have a talent with finding a challenge or why would I do it at all?"

"We could have called Guinness with the amount of rat droppings at this current flip," Auggie put in. "And that was before Hound nearly fell through the floor in the bathroom after they pulled up the linoleum."

"Yeah, that sitch with Hound wasn't awesome," Ryn mumbled.

I stifled a giggle.

"Is that your goal, to become a gazillionaire flipper?" Now it was Boone who was teasing.

"No, love of my life," Ryn retorted, and at hearing those words uttered by his woman, Boone didn't look as roguish anymore. He looked something else and that something else was dreamy. "My goal is not only to become a gazillionaire flipper, but also to have my own show on some DIY network."

With that last bit, Boone was no longer giving his woman loved-up eyes.

He was giving her WTF eyes.

"You want a home improvement show?" he asked.

"Uh." Ryn flipped a hand at Boone. "Look at you. You're camera-ready *all the time*. We'd have fan clubs in, like, *a day* and a line of my personally designed décor at Kohl's in a month."

"I gotta admit, you're totally camera-ready all the time," I entered the conversation.

"Both of you."

Boone shot me a *you're not helping* look.

Aug audibly bit back laughter.

I turned to him.

He winked at me.

I felt that wink explode in my sternum.

*I want you so bad, I wake up thinking that, and go to sleep grieving that I don't have it,*  
my mind practically whimpered after catching that wink.

I shot him a lame smile and looked away.

Looking away was hard.

He was insanely beautiful. Like, Michelangelo-would-stop-in-his-tracks-and-get-on-his-knees-and-beg-him-to-be-a-model beautiful.

But it was more.

Augustus Hero was easy to be with.

He was just...

A nice guy.

A good guy.

Good sense of humor. Good with people. Good at making conversation. Good with kids.

A good friend.

*A good guy.*

And he liked me.

He didn't hide it, and not only the times he'd asked me out.

He was open. Ready for me to go there.

To take us there.

*I want to go there,* my mind whispered.

*No, I need to go there,* it shouted.

I could not go there.

Not now.

Not with my ex, who was also my baby daddy, being a huge jerk.

Not with my beloved daughter caught up in his shenanigans.

Corbin had a revolving door of ladies.

That wasn't going to happen at Mom's house.

Stability.

Safety.

That was what Juno was going to get from her mom.

"I'm not going to be on a house-flipping show," Boone declared, and I could have kissed him for breaking into my thoughts.

"We'll see," Ryn murmured.

"We won't," Boone replied.

"Okay, honey," Ryn said and then gave me big eyes.

I smiled at her, and even though they were being cute, my mind was at a place where I hoped that smile didn't look fake.

Because I was sitting by Auggie, and he was a good guy, he was my friend.

But my gut ached.

"What about you?" Auggie asked, his voice lowered in a way that I knew that question was just for me.

I turned to him, thinking about how much I liked his voice, and finding he'd leaned a little into me, so I also caught his smell.

I liked his smell too.

He smelled like...

“Well?” he prompted.

“What about me, what?”

“Any plans for a reality show?”

Not unless people suddenly found it fascinating to watch someone meditate.

I shook my head.

“No plans to take your rad air horns section on the road?”

I blinked, confused. “Sorry?”

“You and Juno. At the wedding. I’m pretty sure Kool and the Gang would hire you and your girl just to add some pizzazz to their act.”

A surprised giggle erupted from me. “Did you just use the word ‘pizzazz’?”

He shrugged. “I call ’em as I see ’em.”

“I must say, we’re full of pizzazz,” I admitted.

“The synchronized kicks were my favorites,” he noted, making that ache achier, at the same time adding a warmth I decided to ignore at how open he was in communicating he was paying attention. Open but without pressure. Auggie had a knack with that. “And you were always on beat with your ‘Yahoos.’”

“You can’t mess up the ‘yahoo’s,” I stated with mock gravity.

He chuckled and the sound, the sight of his humor was so beautiful, I died a little.

To hide it and move beyond it, I shook my head again, this time (fake) smiling, and asked, “Do you have any plans for a show?”

He shook his head too.

“You’d kill on a reality show,” I noted.

His brows went up as his gorgeous lips quirked. “Yeah? Why?”

“Uh, have you looked in the mirror?” I teased. “You wouldn’t have to do anything, except maybe flex a biceps every once in a while, and *bam!* Instant droves of fans.”

I was so busy trying to be funny, I hadn’t noticed how his eyes shut down as I was talking.

Um.

What was that?

“Did I—?” I began.

“What are you two whispering about?” Boone asked.

I tore my attention from Auggie and caught Ryn giving him a look that stated plain she was just stopping herself from giving him a *don’t interrupt them!* shove.

But no, none of this matchmaking.

From anyone.

Auggie was my friend. He was cool with Juno. He was a great guy to know. He knew we were the last match, destined for each other, and I couldn’t go there, and he understood why I couldn’t go there, and he was cool about that too.

And as much as I wanted more, that was all I could have.

I figured he’d eventually find someone else, but I didn’t think about that (at all, *ever*).

As I’d learned in my life, I had what I had, and I had to find a way to be good with it.

And I had to have the patience to wait until that time (should it ever come) where I’d get what I wanted.

Just a little bit of it and I’d be happy.

Nothing as big as all that was Auggie.

That...

Well, that would only happen in a perfect world.

Not in my world.

Auggie was the impossible dream.

\* \* \* \*

“You’ve gotta go.”

His breaths were still labored.

So were mine.

But his face was in my neck so I could feel his.

They felt beautiful.

He was also still inside me, mostly because he just came.

And so had I.

That felt even more beautiful.

“Sweetheart,” he whispered.

This shouldn’t have happened.

This never should have happened.

What had I done?

Why had I been so *weak*?

I pushed against his chest.

“Auggie, you have to go.”

He lifted his head and looked down at me through the dark.

“Pepper, that was good.”

No.

It was *so* good.

Frantic, I-can't-wait-to-be-inside-you, I-can't-wait-to-get-you-inside-me wall sex right inside my front door?

That was not about ending a dry spell.

That wasn't even about a weak moment.

That was about Auggie.

Auggie and me.

Auggie and me and how *unbelievably fucking good* we were together.

I'd denied it. I'd denied him. I'd denied me. When I looked at him. When he looked at me. When I was with him.

But it couldn't be denied.

We'd just proved it.

We were *unbelievably fucking good together*.

On this thought, with a fair sight more desperation, I pushed again at his chest, trying to squirm away from him.

He kept hold.

And put his mouth to my ear.

"Baby, that was hot, but it was fast, and it was done before things were said. Now we gotta talk."

"No." I shook my head. "No talking. No nothing. That was a mistake."

"It wasn't a mistake."

With desperation mounting, I declared, "It was totally a mistake. *You* are a mistake. *This* is a mistake. It's all a huge *mistake*."

He lifted his head. "I'm a mistake?"

I hated the tone of his voice.

Disbelieving.

Kinda pissed.

A thread of hurt.

*God.*

But I couldn't go back on it.

I couldn't.

This shit was not going to happen to me again.

And I wasn't going to put Juno through it.

Why had I given in?

I knew why. A night with Boone and Ryn being cute and so very together, sitting with Auggie, denying myself.

Then, he was so sweet to me, as he always was, eventually letting myself pretend we weren't there as friends, but we were there...*together.*

Eventually, I'd had just that little too much to drink to make it safe to drive home. Before my right mind, my good-mom mind, my take-care-of-priorities mind could tell my stupid, selfish mind to stop it, I turned my head and asked him to drive me home.

Now we were here.

In my foyer.

Just having had sex.

And it was *me* who'd jumped *him* on my front stoop after he'd done the gentlemanly thing (see! he was perfect!) and walked me to my door.



Then I'd dragged him inside.

"Yes, Auggie." I squirmed again and this time I got away.

My panties were somewhere on the floor. Fortunately, the skirt of my tank t-shirt dress was easy to shimmy back down.

I went to my front door that Aug had slammed after he'd stalked me into my house and before he'd pinned me to the wall.

And the reminder of all of that sent quivers down my inner thighs.

I opened the door and stood abreast of it, eyes to my feet.

"Pepper, sweetheart, you don't want me walking out that door," Auggie warned.

*No, I don't, I thought. I really, really don't.*

But I couldn't have what I wanted.

I never could.

I'd learned that repeatedly.

Why had I forgotten?

Don't reach, you might get it and find out (A) you didn't want it in the first place, or (B) it didn't want you.

So I said nothing.

He stopped in front of me. I could see the toes of his boots close to mine that were exposed by my flat sandals.

There was something very...*wonderful* about that.

His boots.

My sandals.

His masculine.

My toenails painted pale pink.

Him right there.

With me.

“Pepper, look at me.”

“You’ve gotta go,” I repeated.

“Juno’s with him.”

That made the back of my neck itch.

Then again, whenever my girl was gone, doing her time with her dad, I had that feeling.

“Yes, she is.”

“So we can talk.”

“We’re not talking.”

“Pepper—”

My head shot up and I snapped, “God! I shouldn’t have to say it again! Get out, Auggie!

That was stupid and it was weak and it’s not happening again. I’m already mortified enough I let you fuck me. You’re just making it worse.”

For a second, he seemed shocked.

Shocked and hurt.

My heart squeezed.

That wore off fast, he got in my face and growled, “I’m not gonna play this game.”

“I’m not playing a game.”

“I know women like you. And yes, you are.”

He knew women like me?

I didn’t ask, mostly because he didn’t give me the opportunity.

“Thanks for the hot fuck, babe,” he said. “At least that made it worth putting up with this bullshit play.”

And then he was gone.

I closed the door behind him.

Put my forehead to it.

“Huge mistake,” I whispered.

But I knew.

I could tell myself that again and again and again.

But I’d seen the girls with their guys.

So I could repeat it for eternity, and I’d never believe.

No, Augustus Hero was not a mistake.

The mistake would be if he took a chance on me.

Now *that* would be a mistake.

*Huge.*

Because I was a mess.

My family was a mess.

My ex was a mess.

There was only one thing that wasn’t a mess.

The home I gave my daughter.

And that was also the one thing I was determined never to make a mess.

Therefore, I had to do everything in my power to keep things good and safe and right for my girl.

Including denying myself a great guy named Auggie.

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## **Juno**

She'd messed up.

She'd sat at the big, round table in the corner of the coffee area of Fortnum's Used Books.

This meant it was like she had a big light shining on her.

Or signs pointing at her.

Or whatever.

That was bad.

She wasn't supposed to be noticed.

She should have hidden in the bookshelves. Or got close to someone else so the people that worked there would think she was with her mom or dad.

Making things worse, the ladies that worked there, she could tell, were moms.

Toe-tah-lee.

And that was also bad because you couldn't pull things on moms. Moms figured stuff out.

And then there was the big, crazy-looking bearded guy behind the coffee counter.

Oh man.

Juno had a feeling that guy didn't miss *anything*.

Including the fact she'd walked into the store by herself and sat by herself and she'd been there a while.

Truth: she was tall for her age.

She was still only eight years old.

They all kept looking over at her.

They were going to ask her where her mom or dad were, she knew it.

Man...

Oh man.

He needed to get there.

Right away!

She couldn't know he'd come.

Her mom and her mom's friends talked (and they'd talked about him). Juno listened. It wasn't like they acted like Juno was a baby and she couldn't understand what they were saying, or they didn't think she was important, so they forgot she was there. They were cool around her. Natural. Just them. And they thought Juno was cool too.

Unlike her dad (sometimes), her mom knew Juno was with it. She had a brain. She wasn't a little kid anymore.

And she and her mom were a team.

They'd always been a team, but now that she was growing up, they were *more* of a team.

Like, Juno helped with the dishes, and sometimes even helped her mom cook.

And she kept her room tidy so her mom didn't have to tell her to (anymore).

And when Juno asked, Mom began to teach her how to do the laundry. So Juno told her that when she did her own, she could also do her mom's. After she said that, Mom gave her one of her big, tight hugs, so Juno knew that'd help out *a lot*.

Juno had gotten really good at dusting and she never (well, not *never*, but not as much as she used to) forgot to spray the shower with that after-shower spray her mom said helped keep

the shower clean so she didn't have to do it all the time and the glass would look all clear and pretty.

So Juno's mom knew Juno could handle stuff.

It was just that Juno knew, in their team, her mom handled most of the big stuff.

Okay, that was because she was the adult. She was the *mom*.

The big stuff in life, Juno had learned, was not about forgetting the shower spray.

The thing was, there was a lot of stuff her mom had to handle.

Like, way *more* than other moms had to handle.

Which was why Juno was there, right then, at Fortnum's.

It was why, a couple of days ago, she'd grabbed Auntie Ryn's phone real fast when she'd put it down. Nabbed it before it shut off, doing this so Auntie Ryn wouldn't see.

Doing this so she could run to the bathroom with it, find his phone number and write it down.

Why she'd sent the text she'd sent to that number half an hour ago.

A text to the guy she thought could help.

Because Juno knew her mom needed a break.

Juno's mom, Pepper, needed a lot of stuff.

And Juno knew *exactly* what she needed.

Mom just wouldn't go for it.

So Juno had decided *she, Juno*, was going to *make* her go for it.

Not in a mean way.

Hopefully, Mom wouldn't even know it was happening.

But she couldn't do it without a little help.

She couldn't do it without him.

And she had this one chance to talk to him without her mom knowing...

If he came.

*He had to come.*

Uh-oh.

Oh no!

One of the moms that worked there was approaching. The blonde one. The one the crazy-looking guy kept calling "Loopy Loo," which couldn't be her name (but could be proof the crazy-looking guy was just plain crazy).

Juno was either going to have to get out of there, or she was going to have to lie to the blonde lady.

Juno hated lying.

She had to do it with her dad (sometimes) because he was just so...so...*gah!*

But she didn't like it.

And she didn't want to do it to the blonde lady. She was real pretty and dressed cute and looked like she was nice.

Man!

Why couldn't he have just come when Juno—?

Before "Loopy Loo," with that worried expression on her face (which said totally that she was nice), made it to Juno, the bell over the door chimed.

Juno looked right there.

And even though she'd never met him, only ever heard her mom and her mom's crew talking about him, she knew it was him.

It was the suit.

No one else in that place was wearing a suit.

She jumped up from her chair and ran right to him.

So all the people who'd been watching her since she got there would know she was okay, Juno threw her arms around his hips, pressed her cheek to his stomach, hugged him tight and cried, "Finally!"

She felt a hand wrap around the back of her neck (it was a big hand, and it was warm, so it felt nice) and the deep voice of the man she was holding asked, "Juno, is everything okay?"

She tipped her head back and looked into his eyes.

He was worried too.

And she could tell, not even knowing him, he was worried about five-thousand-two-hundred-and-eighty-seven times more than Loopy Loo was.

And Loopy Loo was a mother!

There it was.

Proof.

Juno had done right.

This was the guy to ask.

Of course, in her text, she'd told him he'd had to meet her there *right away*, and the way she did that made it sound like there was something to worry about.

This didn't feel very good because it wasn't a nice thing to do, scaring someone like that.

But sometimes you had to do what you had to do.

Right?

"You know me," she stated, something else that proved she was right.



It was him. He knew her. Even if they'd never met, like she knew him, he knew her.

He *so totally* was the person to ask.

"I do, honey, now answer me, are you okay?"

Juno nodded, fast and happily.

He watched her do that, but he didn't seem to get any less worried.

"Is your mom all right?"

That time, she didn't nod fast and happy.

She shook her head, slow and not happy at all.

Because her mom was not all right.

She tried to hide it, but she was never all right.

If it could be just them, Pepper and Juno, the dream team, they'd be okay. *When* it was just them and her dad didn't mess things up, or her grandfather, or all that other stupid stuff, it was *awesome*.

But it wasn't just them.

Juno's mom had to put up with so much more and it was a serious *pain*.

And she thought Juno couldn't help her, and the sad truth was, for some of it, Juno couldn't.

But her mom couldn't do it alone.

Not anymore.

It wasn't fair.

It wasn't fair all the stuff Juno's dad pulled, and it wasn't fair all the crap her mom's family did.

None of it was fair.

It was too much.

And Juno's mom was strong. The strongest mom *in the whole world*.

But she needed a break.

His body seemed to get tight at her answer before he asked, "Why are you here alone? Is she—?"

Juno let him go and stepped away. "She's fine. She's home. I'm supposed to be at a friend's house. My friend is covering for me. She lives close to here, so she's there...covering. And I walked here to meet you. But I need to get back before her parents figure out what we're doing."

"You're here alone?"

Juno nodded.

Unluckily, but not surprisingly considering the look on his face and the fact he was a grown-up, he kept talking about that.

"You walked here from a friend's house...alone?"

Oh man.

"Uh..."

"Can you explain why you did that?" he asked.

"You're Mr. Cisco, right?"

He nodded but said, "You can call me Brett."

Um.

She didn't know about that.

Mom didn't like her to call people by their first names unless they were super close friends or family.

When they talked about him, Juno could tell Auntie Ryn and Auntie Hattie and Auntie Evie liked Mr. Cisco a lot.

But Juno never called a grown-up by their first name, unless her mom said it was all right.

(Though she did call Auntie Ryn, Auntie Hattie and Auntie Evie, Rinz, Hatz and Ehvz, but only because her mom said she could.)

“Okay then, uh...” she started. “I did that because I need you to help me.”

“Help you with what?”

“Help me make Mom fall in love with Auggie.”

Mr. Cisco’s head ticked as his brows shot *way* up.

And it was then, in a big-guy, too-old way, she thought he was kinda okay-looking (and on top of that, she liked the suit he wore that had a vest—she’d seen Chris Evans in a suit like that, and Chris Evans was *the world*).

She thought Mr. Cisco was more okay-looking when his expression suddenly changed, and she liked the way his eyes got. They made her *feel* like one of her mom’s brownies warm out of the oven *tasted*.

And he replied, “I’m all in.”

Juno felt something inside her get all loose when she didn’t know it had been tight and hurting.

But it had been.

And she sent a silent message to Heaven, something that she would never in a million, billion, *trillion* years admit to her stupid grandfather she did (though, she did it a lot, it felt nice sending messages to Heaven).

*Thank you, God.*

But in real life, she smiled so big at Mr. Cisco, her face hurt.

And he smiled back at her.

***Dream Keeper* will be unleashed November 30, 2021**

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