

## ISA AND LOTTE

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Isa's strongest memory was the day he first saw Lotte at highschool. She'd walked into the classroom, a beacon of light in a sea of teenage indifference. Her hair fell in soft waves, framing a face that could've been painted by the angels themselves. She had the kind of smile that could make you feel like you'd just been handed the winning lottery ticket of life. That was two years ago, when they were fifteen. Now, at seventeen, Isa's love for Lotte had only grown stronger, though it remained unspoken, a secret he guarded fiercely behind the wall of his shyness.

One fateful afternoon, during their usual drawing class, Richard, the unlikely artist of the class, decided to unleash his talents. His usual drawings were of fast cars and skulls, but today was different. He'd drawn a portrait of Lotte that was so stunning it took everyone's breath away. The tattoo boys, who usually snickered at Isa's clumsy attempts at romance, were silent. The classroom buzzed with whispers, and even the teacher couldn't hide his admiration. Lotte's name was scrawled in bold letters across the top of the paper, the letters looping and swirling like the tendrils of a vine around a trellis. It was a declaration, a testament to the beauty that had captured their class's tough guy's heart.

The portrait was so lifelike it seemed as if Lotte had been caught in a moment of pure vulnerability, her eyes reflecting a depth of emotion that Jelle had only ever dreamed of seeing. Her cheeks were a soft pink, and her lips a delicate shade of coral, like a blush and a smile had collided. The drawing teacher, Mr. Van der Meer, who was known for his stern critiques, couldn't help but let a smile play at the corners of his mouth. He nodded his head in approval, the noise of his palette knife tapping against the wooden table echoing through the room.

"It's a masterpiece, Richard," he said, his voice thick with admiration. "I must say, this is truly exceptional. I think we have a contender for the school art exhibition."

The room erupted in applause, a sound that seemed to both bolster Richard's confidence and make him squirm in his seat. Lotte, on the other hand, was a picture of confusion. She looked from the drawing to Richard, her eyes wide and her cheeks flushed. She had noticed the glances he had been stealing at her during class but had never suspected this. She felt a strange mix of flattery and embarrassment, a feeling that was only amplified by the sudden spotlight on her.

For the rest of the class, the air was charged with excitement. The tension between Richard and Lotte was palpable, and everyone waited to see how she would react. When the bell finally rang, signaling the end of class, she made a beeline for the door, not sparing a second glance at the portrait. Isa watched her go, his heart sinking. He had hoped the drawing would be a bridge between them, but it had only served to widen the gap.

As the days passed, the portrait remained in the hallway, a silent testament to Richard's drawing talent. Lotte avoided the area whenever she could, and when she couldn't, she walked by with her eyes averted. Isa felt like a spectator in a play he had no part in, his heart aching with every step she took away from him. The whispers and knowing looks from their classmates didn't help, either. They had always been friendly, but now there was an unspoken question hanging in the air whenever they interacted. Finally Lotte's drawing was handed over to Isa. His classmates had all fun with it.

But the universe had a peculiar sense of humor. A few weeks later, on a quiet Saturday, Richard and Robbie, his tattooed friend, found themselves at Wilco's house. They'd heard he had an electric guitar they could borrow for the weekend. Little did they know, Wilco's parents were close with Lotte's. As they strummed the strings, lost in their music, they had no idea they had an audience.

Lotte and her father had just pulled up in their car, returning from a shopping trip. They stepped out into the driveway, the sound of the guitar playing reaching their ears. Curiosity piqued, they followed it into Wilco's home where Richard was shredding a solo. Lotte's heart skipped a beat when she saw him, the same guy who had drawn her so beautifully. Her father looked at her, a knowing smile playing on his lips.

"Isn't that the boy who drew your portrait, Lotte?" he whispered.

Her eyes locked onto Richard, the strings of the guitar singing a melody that seemed to resonate with the rhythm of her heart. She nodded, her sternness melting away into curiosity. She had never seen this side of him, the artist, the musician. He was more than just the tough exterior everyone knew.

As the final notes of the song faded, Richard looked up and noticed Lotte and her father standing in the doorway. He looked for a moment into Lotte's eyes, then kept on playing.

Lotte felt a strange mix of emotions watching Richard perform so confidently. She had never seen this side of him before, and she couldn't help but feel drawn to it. The tattoo guy sitting next to him still deterred her a bit from contacting both of them. She

sat down a tad askew and continued to look mesmerized at Richard, whose drawing of her had caused so much commotion at school and eventually at her home. Maybe she would just leave it as it was and not dwell on it further. After all, how well did she know Richard? In the end, by playful and artistic means, a hard truth had been revealed to her: Isa was in love with her. Not Richard but Isa was the one she needed to keep an eye on.

But here was Richard, playing the guitar like a pro, the same hands that had created the portrait of her. Lotte couldn't tear her eyes away from his fingers dancing over the strings, the same hands that had so tenderly outlined her features.

Her father cleared his throat, breaking the spell. "We should say hello," he suggested gently, nudging her. "No," she whispered. Her dad tried not to laugh.