

THE DAVIDSONS



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EMMA'S WHISTLE

Emma was sitting on her backyard lawn, strumming her guitar, when she heard the familiar sound of a doorbell. With no one else at home, she went around to the front porch.

“Em, you promised to come over and help me make posters today. Did you forget?”

Sharleen was running for Student Council President, and Emma had agreed to serve as her friend's campaign manager.

“Uh, of course not,” Emma replied. “I was just about to head over to your place.”

Five minutes later, the two of them were brainstorming election slogans at Sharleen's house. After agreeing on ‘Vote for Sharleen Forest, the Smart Choice!’, they drew posters to hang at school and talked about the other candidates. When Emma said goodbye at dinner time and opened the front door to leave, she was surprised to see how hard it was raining. She borrowed an umbrella from Sharleen and hurried home.

While brushing her teeth that night, Emma suddenly remembered what she had left outside. She quickly rinsed her mouth and rushed to the backyard in her pajamas, but it was too late. It had poured for hours, and the wooden guitar was damaged beyond repair.

Seeing how distressed Emma was, her father offered to pay half the cost of a new guitar. The ruined one was going to need to be replaced eventually anyway, but since eventually had arrived much sooner than it should have, Mr. Davidson explained to his daughter that it was her responsibility to help purchase a new instrument.

The following afternoon, the sun was shining, and Emma was beginning to feel better about her unfortunate mistake.

“Dad, I just saw a really nice Hama-Ya at Darsey Music. I tried it out, and it’s perfect for me. It’s on sale too. But half the sale price is still a LOT more money than I have.”

“Well, Emmy,” her father replied, “I guess it’s time for you to get a part-time job.”

“I’m twelve, Dad. Who’s going to hire me? I can’t even get babysitting jobs until next year.”

“Hmmm, I think you might be in luck. Kayla’s father told me the other day that he registered her for a soccer-referee course starting soon. He said they pay twenty-five dollars for officiating U8 games.”

Emma played pick-up soccer when she wasn't practicing or competing with her travel basketball team. She enjoyed 'the beautiful game' and knew the rules.

"Wow! Twenty-five bucks to ref a game for seven-year-olds? Sure. I'll do that! Sounds like easy money."

"I don't know if the money's easy," Mr. Davidson responded, "but if you cover half the cost of the referee uniform, I'll pay for the certification course, okay?"

She hugged her dad. *Things are looking up*, she said to herself.

The next day, Mr. Davidson bought the guitar, and his daughter agreed that by the start of summer camp, she would reimburse him her share of its cost, as well as half the price of the referee uniform. Three weeks later, she was awarded a course-completion certificate, a badge, and a whistle. She was eager to sign up for games and start earning big money.

Emma's first match as a referee was bumpy. She wasn't always in the right place on the field, and when she blew the whistle it was too soft. By her third game, she felt more confident, and afterwards she received compliments from a coach and a parent about the job she did. *This is going to be a piece of cake*, she thought. *At this rate, I'll be able to*

pay Dad back before camp and have plenty of spending money too!

The following Saturday, forty minutes before Mr. Davidson was supposed to drive Nate to his team's soccer match at Waterfront Park, Emma received a frantic phone call from Kayla.

“Em, you've got to help me out. I'm supposed to ref the two o'clock Strikers – Thunder Hawks game at Waterfront, but my cousin just offered me her ticket to the dog show that starts at three in Westerville. Can you please take my place? Please?”

Emma frowned but didn't reply.

“I know your brother's on the Thunder Hawks,” her friend continued, “but Mr. Sherman said *any* certified ref can replace me. There's no time to find someone else.”

Emma felt apprehensive about refereeing Nate's game, but she knew how much Kayla loved dogs, and the chance to earn an extra twenty-five dollars was too tempting to pass up.

“I'll do it,” she replied.

A few minutes after two o'clock, Emma stood next to the kick-off circle and blew her whistle to start the match. Nate was on the bench for most of the first half and jumped up

and cheered when the Thunder Hawks went ahead 3-0. The team looked unbeatable. Emma was glad for her brother but didn't show it.

In the second half, the Strikers staged a comeback. They quickly scored two goals, and with under ten minutes left to play, Nate made a mistake on defense that allowed the Strikers to tie the game. He looked miserable, but Coach Sims kept him on the field.

The teams traded possession several more times, and Emma stopped the game twice for substitutes to enter. As she had been trained to do, she looked at her watch every now and then to keep track of how much time remained.

With less than a minute to play, number ten, the Strikers' most skillful player, stole the ball near his own goal and weaved his way up the field. He dribbled between his opponents until only one defender stood between him and the Thunder Hawks goalie. Emma checked the time again. There were eleven seconds left before she was supposed to blow her whistle.

The Strikers player closed in on the goal, but Nate ran and blocked his path. As the boys collided, Emma glanced at her watch and blew the whistle. Was it the end of the game or the signal for a foul?

Without hesitation, Emma pointed her arm to indicate that the Strikers had earned a free kick. Following the rule book, she set the ball down at the spot of the foul, made sure that the players on both teams were in position, and blew her whistle to start the last play. Number ten stepped to the ball and with his left foot blasted a shot into the net. Emma blew the whistle again. Game over.

While the Strikers and their coach and families rejoiced, two Thunder Hawks fathers—who had been complaining throughout the second half about some of Emma’s decisions—went berserk. They ran onto the field and screamed at Emma, accusing her of making the wrong call and dragging the game out too long. She stayed silent and tried to ignore them as she walked towards the corner flag, took out her pen and match report from her shirt pocket, and wrote down the final score. In the meantime, Mr. Davidson was on the sideline trying to console Nate while, nearby, the losing goalie’s mother had her arm around her heartbroken son. Across the field, the opposing coaches were arguing about how the game had ended.

On the drive home, the only sounds in the car came from the quiet sobs of Nate and the sniffles of his sister. When they entered the house, he flung off his cleats, went to his room upstairs, and shut the door. Emma sat on the living-room couch, still shocked by the reaction of the adults.

“Dad,” she said. “I don’t think I can do this anymore. I tried my best, but my best wasn’t good enough. Otherwise, those parents wouldn’t have yelled at me like that.”

“Oh, Emmy,” her father replied. “People don’t always behave reasonably, especially soccer parents. I understand how you feel, but it doesn’t do any good to run away from difficult situations. Sticking things out is the only way we can learn to be resilient.”

Emma shrugged.

“I’m proud of how good a referee you are,” he continued, “and for making a call you thought was right, even though you knew it would upset your brother—not to mention his coach, his teammates, and their families. Well, except me, at least. And besides,” he said with a wink, “how are you going to pay me back if you quit now?”

Mr. Davidson reached over and gave Emma a hug. A few moments later, she stood up and walked towards her guitar that was leaning against the bookshelf.

“What are you up to now, Emmy?”

“I’m gonna write a song, Dad.”

She paused. Then she added with a hint of a smile, “I think I’ll call it *The Referee Blues*.”

Mr. Davidson put his head back and laughed.