

# Miles

Miles spent most of his days wandering the vast, sprawling vineyards near his home, feeling the weight of the world pressing down on him. The familiar rows of grapevines, with their dense green foliage, were a temporary escape from the constant pressure of school, family expectations, and the ever-present shadow of his relationship with his older brother, Wynton. Wynton's anger over the broken bow had cast a long shadow over their relationship, and the more Miles tried to make amends, the further he seemed to drift from his brother. To complicate matters, Miles harbored a secret ability—he could see the souls of dogs, a gift that made him feel even more isolated. Hiding this gift from others, he often felt disconnected from the world, like he was living on the outskirts of his own life. His inability to share his thoughts and experiences with anyone, particularly his family, weighed heavily on him, making him retreat further into the solitude of the vineyards.

Despite the peaceful setting of the vineyards, Miles could not escape his sense of loneliness and emotional turmoil. He longed for a connection, a way to feel understood by someone who could see beyond the surface. His classmates, friends, and even his family saw him as the perfect student—the ideal son, the one who followed all the rules. But inside, Miles felt like a cosmic mistake, a person out of sync with his own body and soul. His emotional struggles only grew more pronounced as he withdrew from the activities that had once been his refuge, such as track, math club, and volunteering. After a particularly dramatic exit from a track meet, Miles had not returned to school, and each passing day added to his sense of isolation. His disconnection from everything and everyone around him made him question his own identity, and he found himself spiraling into a deeper state of despair.

Amidst this internal turmoil, the one constant in Miles's life was his dog, Sandro. Sandro's loyalty was unwavering, and their shared moments of silence allowed Miles to

express his emotions without saying a word. In the quiet companionship of his dog, Miles found some semblance of peace. The two shared a bond that transcended words, with Sandro understanding Miles's pain in ways that no one else could. But even this connection with his dog couldn't fill the void of loneliness that lingered in Miles's heart. While his bond with Sandro was comforting, Miles knew deep down that he craved a human connection—someone to understand him fully, to see the depths of his struggles, and to accept him as he was.

One afternoon, as Miles wandered the vineyards once again, his path crossed with a girl in a vintage orange truck. She was parked under the shade of the grapevines, and her presence immediately caught his attention. She was different from anyone he had ever met—adorned with tattoos and surrounded by books, she seemed both mysterious and intriguing. Miles approached her, and their conversation flowed easily, marked by an unspoken understanding between them. Her voice was deep, and there was an unmistakable sadness in her eyes that mirrored his own emotional state. As they spoke, the girl fumbled with her keys, clearly troubled, and Miles instinctively tried to comfort her, though he wasn't sure how. She shared a quote from Joseph Campbell, one that resonated deeply with Miles, leaving him with a sense of awe and curiosity. It felt like their brief interaction held something deeper, something meaningful that neither of them could fully grasp at the moment.

As the girl drove off, leaving behind a lingering sense of connection, Miles was left with a feeling he hadn't experienced in a long time—hope. The encounter had sparked something inside him, a flicker of emotion that he hadn't realized he was capable of feeling. For the first time in ages, he felt a sense of longing, not just for a connection, but for a deeper understanding of himself. He quickly scribbled down the quote she had shared, as well as the sentiment from her tattoo, eager to hold onto something from their interaction. As her truck slowed and prepared to leave, Miles found himself running toward it, a surge of emotion pushing him forward. It was as if he could feel the possibility of a new chapter in his life unfolding, one where he might finally find the connection and understanding he had been searching for all along.