

The Secret Life of Isabella Grace

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Isabella brushed a strand of dark hair impatiently off her sweaty forehead and glanced down at the thousands of eager faces in the concert venue that were trained on her. She gripped the microphone tightly in her hand, feeling nervousness and excitement pulsing through her. She drew in a sharp breath as the steady beat of the song began to play. She tapped her studded leather boots to the beat, and then she began to sing....

"Isabella," a sharp voice pierced the concert scene, and Isabella jolted out of her daydream. The concert venue melted away into her cluttered Algebra classroom. Mrs. Norbury was glaring at her from the front of the classroom. "Did you hear the question?"

"Um . . ." Isabella glanced at the other students, who were all staring at her. Her face flushed scarlet. "No."

"I *said*," Mrs. Norbury said sharply, "what is the quadratic equation?"

"I don't know, Mrs. Norbury," Isabella muttered. "I wasn't paying attention."

Mrs. Norbury cast her a sharp look and scribbled the quadratic equation across the whiteboard. As she droned on about factoring polynomials, Isabella forced herself to pay attention, but it was hard. Algebra was her last class of the day, and she could hardly wait for school to be over.

Isabella was relieved when the tuneless sound of the bell rang throughout the classroom. "Homework!" Mrs. Norbury screeched. "Page 253 in your Algebra textbook, due tomorrow!"

Isabella stuffed her binder into her backpack and slung it over her shoulder. She was about to leave when Mrs. Norbury stopped her.

"Isabella," she said. "Can I have a word with you?"

Isabella headed to the front of the classroom. "Yeah?" she said apprehensively.

"I need to see more effort from you in this class," Mrs. Norbury admonished. "Right now, you're failing Algebra."

Isabella stared into Mrs. Norbury's hazel eyes and nodded. "Sorry. I'll try harder." She turned to leave. She could feel Mrs. Norbury watching her as she walked out of the door.

As Isabella walked home, she shifted her heavy backpack uncomfortably and sighed. What would her dad say when he found out she was failing Algebra? She wondered what it would be like to be good at Algebra...

Mrs. Norbury scribbled a complex equation on the whiteboard and demanded, "Would anyone be willing to solve this problem using the quadratic formula?" Isabella's hand shot into the air.

"Yes, Isabella? Would you like to demonstrate?" Mrs. Norbury prompted.

Isabella scrambled out of her chair and rushed to the front of the room, where she proceeded to write out a solution to the problem that took up the space of the entire whiteboard, "The answer is $x=2$," she said.

"Very good!" Mrs. Norbury said as Isabella made her way back to her desk. The other students stared at Isabella in awe as she perched smugly in her seat, casting her classmates a superior look. .

"Watch where you're going, you clumsy oaf!" A sharp voice brought Isabella back to reality. Jonathan, the smartest kid in her Algebra class, was glaring at her.

Isabella blushed. "Sorry," she muttered. Even though in her in her daydream she was a math genius, in real life she wasn't even passing her Algebra class.

When she got home from school, she stepped inside the apartment building and climbed the multiple flights of stairs to her family's apartment. Her dad wasn't home yet from his shift at McDonald's, and her brother wasn't yet back from school. The apartment was small and cluttered. Isabella headed to her bedroom, flung her heavy backpack to one side, and flopped onto the bed. Her bedroom was comparable to the size of a closet.

"I wish my family wasn't so poor," she thought aloud....

Isabella grabbed the bell on her bedside table and shook it. "Mary!" she called.

Almost immediately, one of her family's servants rushed into her bedroom. "Yes, ma'am?"

"Bring me some ice water," Isabella said. "But not too cold."

The servant returned seconds later with a glass of ice water. She eased the cup onto the bedside table. "Anything else, ma'am?"

"No, no. Leave." Isabella sipped her water as she sprawled on the bed. Her room was pink and frilly and the size of an average house. The king-sized four-poster bed was draped with silken awnings and fluffy pink blankets.

"I love being rich," she sighed happily. "I'm so glad my grandfather founded McDonald's."...