



LETTER

The Crooked Ladder

A father's letter to his son, on his wedding day

A letter to Daniel

Dear Daniel,

I'm writing this the night before, which feels right, because so much of what I want to say isn't the kind of thing you say out loud in a room full of people, even a room full of people who love you. So I'm putting it here instead, where you can read it quietly, maybe tomorrow morning while everyone else is still getting ready, maybe years from now when you've forgotten I wrote it at all.

I keep thinking about that summer you turned nine, when we built the treehouse. I don't know if you remember how bad it actually was - the floor sloped if you set a marble down it would roll clean off the edge, and the ladder, that ladder, came out so crooked I was sure one of us was going to break an ankle on it. I wanted to fix it. I had the tools out. And you stood at the bottom of that ladder like you were guarding something sacred and said, "Don't fix it, it's ours." Nine years old, and you already understood something it took me a lot longer to learn - that the things we build with our own hands, imperfect as they are, belong to us in a way that nothing store-bought or straightened-out ever could. That ladder is still there, by the way. Still crooked. I walk past it sometimes and smile.

I think about that moment tomorrow because I believe a marriage is a lot like that treehouse. It's not going to be plumb and level and perfect. There will be boards that don't quite meet, places where the thing you built together leans a little. And the temptation, always, will be to fix it, to smooth it out, to make it look like what you think it's supposed to look like. I hope you remember what you knew at nine - that the crookedness isn't the failure. The crookedness is the proof that you built it yourselves, plank by plank, choice by choice, and that it's yours.

You've always been the one who shows up. I don't know if you think of that as anything special, but I do - the way you're the first one in the car when a friend is moving apartments, the first one with your sleeves rolled up when somebody needs a hand, no fanfare, no waiting to be asked twice. That's not a small thing, Daniel. That's most of what a good life is made of, actually. Not grand gestures. Just showing up, again and again, for the people who need you. I think that's what marriage is too, when you get down to it - not one enormous promise made once, but a thousand small kindnesses, repeated on ordinary Tuesdays, long after anyone's watching. Taking out the trash without being asked. Remembering how she takes her coffee. Showing up. I've watched you do that your whole

life for the people around you, and I have no doubt you'll do it for Priya, every single day, in ways no one will ever write a toast about but that will matter more than almost anything else.

And Priya - I love that she laughs at your worst jokes. Not just tolerates them, laughs at them, which anyone who's been on the receiving end of your sense of humor knows is a particular kind of grace. It tells me she sees you. The real you, jokes and all, steady and funny and good. That's rare, Daniel. Hold onto it.

I am so proud of the man you've become. Not because of anything you've achieved or acquired, but because of who you are in the small, unwitnessed moments - the moving boxes you've carried, the crooked things you've refused to let anyone straighten out, the person you've chosen to love and the way you've chosen to love her. Tomorrow you start building something new, the two of you, and I hope it ends up a little lopsided in places, and I hope you never let anyone fix it, because it will be yours.

With love,