

Teardrops in the Rain

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Prologue

Ten Years Ago

Amongst the hustle and bustle of the Sentinel High School Cafeteria, his eyes were fixed on but one thing. She was so adorable, she was definitely not "hot." That wasn't something that he would ever say of a girl. To say a girl was 'hot' was crude, crass and vulgar. She was something better than "hot," she was beautiful. Beauty to him represented so much more than looks. Rather, it encompassed grace, elegance and maybe even a degree of innocence. But what did he know of beauty? He was only sixteen. Maybe this was all just a farce and he was only deluding himself into thinking that he had any chance with her. Sure, she was a year older than him. Sure, it was well-known that she had even had a crush on his younger brother, Jack. Sure, he didn't exactly have girls figured out yet, but it was something that you couldn't be taught, right? Maybe not.

She was rather popular amongst her peers, but there were all of those times that she had actually paid attention to him when most other girls made very certain to not even allow him to think that they could possibly be interested in him. He was nice. Maybe too nice. Whatever it was, he hadn't been on a date yet and it was something he wanted to change. Something to strike from the record, as if it were some mile marker that he should've been beyond by his age, somewhere on par with getting out of his diapers.

Still, as he gazed at her from across the cafeteria, he couldn't help but let his mind wander to the idea of how perfect she was for him. She was probably everything that his mother could've wanted in a girl for him, even if he was just finishing up with the eleventh grade. If he really thought about it, she was quite

similar to his mother. Both were strong, charismatic, and capable of expressing themselves, particularly when it came to their opinions. Not him so much; he was definitely more passive, reserved and often fumbled with his words. Ah, but not with her, though. He felt comfortable around her, something that he couldn't say for most girls. She had to be perfect for him. They both had blonde hair, so that would have to be something going for him. Weren't blonde hair genes dying out? It only made sense that the two of them do their part together to ensure that there would always be blondes in this world. There was a genetic responsibility that he owed to humanity.

They would have such beautiful children together. With her sharp facial structure and his usually positive attitude, they'd have such amazing children, wouldn't they? He had the personality and she had the looks. Well, he wasn't ugly, nor was he plain. He wasn't likely to be a model by any stretch of the imagination, but he had never made a child cry. Then again, there was that one time, but that wasn't important for the moment.

Her friend sat down next to her as she nibbled away on her lunch. Probably wasn't the best time. He wasn't going to ask her while there were others around. That'd mean that there would be other girls around, which would just make him awkward. Of course, that was a major problem, because she did have a lot of friends. Lots of female friends whom she often spent time with. But, then again, maybe it'd be worth it, because he would have good alone-time with her, no doubt. Yeah, together they would.

What was he thinking? Why was he kidding himself? There was no future between them. She wanted to work for the United Nations and travel. He hated flying; in fact, he was petrified of it. Though surely, they could work through that.

"Hey Noah!"

"Oh...hey Jenna," he said, as the young girl his age took a seat across from him at the cafeteria table.

"Whatcha thinkin'?" she asked.

"Nothing," he said, while he looked over her shoulder at that special someone.

Jenna took a quick glance over her shoulder, "Ahh, I see what you're looking at."

"What?"

"Why are you still thinking about her?"

"Because....I like her. A lot."

"Why do you like her?"

"Because, she's just so..."

"Noah, we already talked about her," said Jenna. "She's not good enough for you."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it's true. You're going to meet an absolutely amazing girl one day. I know it."

"She's the one."

"No, she isn't. Trust me, Noah."

Noah continued to gaze over Jenna's shoulder, while he chewed his food. Jenna tried to return his attention to her, but failed. Noah started to daydream about his wedding day. She'd look so stunning in her wedding dress. He had it picked out for her in his mind. A long, strapless gown with fine embroidery on the

torso and a nice neckline. He didn't know much about all that dress lingo, but he knew what she'd look like.

"Hello! Noah! Earth to Noah!"

"Huh?"

"She doesn't like you."

"How do you know that?"

"I can tell, I'm a girl."

"I think she likes me."

"Then why didn't she come and sit with you for lunch?"

"That doesn't mean anything. And besides...I have to make the first move."

"Please, as your best friend, forget her!"

"I can't. She's perfect for me."

"Ugh," she said in frustration. "I don't want to see you get hurt again. Please....please, listen to me."

"She's the only girl I feel comfortable with and don't get awkward with."

"Uh, hello?"

"What?"

"What about me?" she said. "Am I not a girl?"

"That's not what I meant-"

"Whatever," said Jenna. "I'm going to go sit with Jarred. You're welcome to come with, but I don't want to interrupt your daydreaming."

"It's easy for you, Jenna," said Noah. "You have someone. I don't."

"Right. Well, I don't know what more to say, so I'm gonna see you later. Call me tonight about going rollerblading on the seawall on Saturday, okay?"

"Sure," he said, saying nothing more as he turned his attention back to the object of his affection. She was laughing with her friends. She had such a beautiful smile when she laughed. There would be a lot of good memories with that smile in their future together.

Noah stood up from his chair, having not finished his lunch yet, and decided that he was going to ask her, with or without her female friends around. However, as soon as he stood up, his sudden confidence disappeared. There was no way that she'd say yes. She probably just wanted to be friends. How often he had been told that, much to his disappointment. Yet, there was still something inside of Noah that insisted that he not give up his future with her. What would be lost by asking her? If he never asked her, they'd never have a future together. If he asked her, then there had to be better odds of a future together, right? It was worth a shot. Ah, but then the voice of reason, like the Faustian angel on his shoulder, told him to exercise grave caution. There was nothing certain with girls, they were completely unpredictable. For goodness' sake, when was he going to grow up and be a man? If he didn't ask her, then that'd get him nowhere and he'd always be 'that nice guy' who never had a girlfriend. He didn't want that. No guy wanted that.

She made him feel sick in his stomach. The thought of him not having the courage to just ask her made him feel like an even bigger sissy. He couldn't just forget about her, she was too special to him. Besides, Jenna must've forgotten that time when the woman of his affection had sat at the same cafeteria table with him and the two had chatted away. Granted, she did ask several questions about Jack, but she obviously was over him and must've moved on to Noah.

It was now or never. If he didn't ask her then, he might never get this close to doing so again. Even more so, since Jenna would try to convince him against it again. He looked down and took a hold of his small milk carton that came with his lunch. He took a final swig of it, then returned it to his cafeteria tray and let out a heavy sigh. He was going to do it.

He left his seat and meandered through the tables and kept his eyes on her. She hadn't noticed him, but she was talking. He shut off all distractions around him and focused on her. This was his moment. His heart beat quicker and quicker the closer he came to her. There was more than a few times that he nearly bailed out on it, but he angrily snapped at those thoughts in his mind that tried to convince him away from his destiny. It was his destiny. Whether he was accepted or rejected, this was his destiny. This moment, he would never forget.

Then came the moment when he was awkwardly standing behind her. Several of her friends across the table from her noticed him standing there, which caused her to turn to see what they were starring at.

"Um, excuse me, Kelly?" said Noah, nearly gagging with nervous anxiety as he said it.

"Hi Noah," she said, smiling at him. This was a good sign. She obviously wasn't repulsed by him.

"How are you?"

"I'm great," she said. "How are you?"

"I'm good."

"That's great."

"Yeah, it is."

"So....what's up?"

"Uh, not much, you know?" he said, not feeling like himself.

"Ah, okay," she said, nodding her head.

"So yeah..."

"Uh huh."

"So..."

"What's up, Noah?"

"Not much," he said. "How about that chemistry test? Mr. Dueck, he's a toughie, huh?"

"Yeah, I guess," she said, feeling a little impatient, but still being polite to Noah.

"Yeah...I guess."

"Was there something that you wanted?"

"Umm, yeah, I was gonna ask you if..."

"Ask me what?"

"Would you, uh, maybe, possibly...I dunno," he said, feeling himself holding back from just saying it, then it came. "Could I take you to the prom next month?"

Several of her friends nearly choked with laughter, which drew a glare from Kelly, but then she turned to Noah. She stood up and took Noah's arm and led him away from the table of her friends. This must've been a good sign, despite her friends. Their arms were linked! Girls don't do that unless they like the boy, right? She continued to lead him until they were just outside of the cafeteria and she led him to one of the hallway walls. Noah's heart began to race with excitement. She was going to say yes. He knew he was right to think that she liked him all along. Jenna was wrong for once.

Noah's face beamed with glee, which showed his braces. Usually, he was really self-conscious about them, but that couldn't stop him from showing how happy he was. Kelly smiled at him, then took Noah's hands. Another good sign!

"Listen, Noah," she said, starring down at his hands. "I'm really quite flattered."

"You don't have to be though!"

"No, but I am," she said. "You're a really nice guy and I can tell that you're really special. You're so nice to everyone, even the guys who pick on you and I think that that really says something about your character."

"Well, thank you," said Noah, blushing a little.

"You're welcome," she said.

"So, you'll go with me?"

"Um, well, see..." she said, before pausing, then looking down the hallway corridor. After a few seconds, she looked up to Noah and peered into his eyes. "You're a really great guy and I really like you, as a friend."

Noah's heart sank. Those happy feelings in his stomach that resulted from nervous anticipation, they quickly turned to feelings of nausea. His smile disappeared almost instantaneously, though he spared himself from dropping his jaw.

"I mean, you never swear, you never drink, you don't stare at girls, or anything like that," she continued. "It's like you're perfect. Maybe too perfect, for me. I'm not like you, but you do inspire me. For all that, though, I don't think that we're right for each other. Besides, you shouldn't like a girl like me—"

"Don't say that!" said Noah, sounding as if he were pleading to her almost. "You're perfect for me—"

"Noah, please, we're still in high school. We barely know each other," she said, motioning with her hand for him to be silent. "I'm not that girl for you. Listen, you're going to make such an amazing boyfriend one day, better yet, your future wife is going to be so lucky to have you as hers....but I'm not ready to think about that stuff for myself. I just wanna have fun right now."

"But..."

"When you get married," she said, "there's going to be a long list of girls wishing that you were theirs."

"Why are you saying that?"

"Just, please," she said, then going silent for a moment. "I can't go to the prom with you, Noah. I'm sorry."

Noah stared at her for a moment, trying to think of something to convince her yet. "I don't know what to say."

"Maybe there isn't anything to say," she said, respecting the fact that he was obviously very disappointed. "I should go. I'm sorry, Noah. Don't hate me, please."

Noah opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came as she began to walk away slowly. She stopped by the cafeteria door, but didn't turn to look at him again. Instead, she continued on after a moment's pause and headed back towards her cafeteria table. Noah watched her walk away. When she returned to her seat, her friends were laughing, which wouldn't have been such a bad thing. He could've dealt with that, but then she seemed to join in their laughter, no doubt mocking him and his awkwardness. She probably didn't realize that he could see her, but that wasn't any excuse for her behaviour in Noah's mind.

Noah had no appetite. He didn't have even the courage to return to his cafeteria tray and dispose of it, instead he decided to head home. He'd skip his last two classes of the day. He wasn't in the mood for listening to any teachers ramble on. Plus, it'd probably get around that he asked her out and was turned down. His humiliation was enough for one day. He walked down the hallway towards the exit doors, looking sullen and painfully rejected. Again.