

The Ultimate Sacrifice

by Jenna Sundel

It fluttered out of my locker like a bird. It was in a red envelope with my name on it. It bewildered me. No one knows my locker combination. That kind of information is confidential. Besides, I have no one to share it with anyway. I threw the note directly in the garbage. I get these notes everyday, but never in my locker before. I find them written in my textbook, or on a sticky note on my desk. I learned the hard way to just ignore them. They will destroy you in the end. “Nerd” “Geek” “Ugly”. The names get worse and worse until you can’t take it anymore. I don’t know who writes the notes, but it’s one of those mean girls. The ones who walk around the school like they own it, insulting everyone in their path. Yet, everybody still worships them. I am smarter than that. They wear tons of makeup and expensive designer clothes. It’s all a facade. Deep down inside, we are all the same. The insults still harm me, but I know that being beautiful and fake will bring me nowhere. You tell yourself that you’re better than they will ever be, yet the insults still hurt you. They get stuck in your head like a song on the radio.

After school, I went to the library. The library is my second home. All the librarians know me by name. Besides reading, this is why I go to the library. The librarians are my only friends. That’s why the mean girls target me. Nerds and loners are their main target. I picked up my favorite book, “A Tree Grows in Brooklyn”. As soon as I opened the book, there was a sticky note in it. I decided to read it. To this day, I don’t know whether that was a good decision or a bad decision.

The note was on a yellow sticky note written with blue ink in perhaps the best handwriting I had ever seen. It read:

“Dear Lily, I love you. Love, Your Secret Admirer.”

Just three simple words. I thought that it was from the mean girls for a second, but they’ve never written a nice note. Perhaps it was a trap, but I didn’t want to believe that. I needed confidence. I needed to know that someone my age truly cares about me. My heart was beating a thousand times per minute, thinking about a boy who liked me. I pictured it like something out of a romance novel. That was the moment when I started to search for my secret admirer.

The whole thing seemed crazy. I found it in the town library. Anybody in the town could have written it. I was not going to go from door to door like a girl scout trying to sell cookies. What if one of the mean girls answered the door. Not that they had ever said a word to me, but it would be great material to write in their notes. According to them, I was such a loser that they couldn’t talk to me. I knew that I had to give up.

Yet, the next day there was a note in that same book. The same yellow sticky note with the same blue ink. I told myself to close the book and pick a different book. My eyes and body didn’t listen. The note read:

“Dear Lily, You are the most beautiful girl I have ever seen. I want to tell you who I am, but I am too shy. I want you to come to me. I don’t go to your school. Love, Your Secret Admirer.”

At this point, I was perplexed. I go to the only high school in my town. He either had to be homeschooled or he lived in another town. Then, I thought of another possibility.

It all seemed so familiar. The smell of chemicals mixed with hand sanitizers. The nurses and doctors rushing from room to room. The sound of monitors beeping. It brought me back to the night my parents found out.

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It was last year in June. The notes were driving me crazy. “Fat!” “Ugly!” I couldn’t remember the last time I ate. I thought that would make them stop. Of course, they continued. I was studying at my desk when everything went dark. I woke up in a hospital room. My parents were pacing the room with an angry and concerned look on their face.

I said, “What happened?”

My dad yelled, “Why are you are starving yourself? Why didn’t you tell us? Do you realize that you could have died? All those nights you told us that you ate dinner when you got home from the library real late. When you told us that you buy breakfast and lunch at school. It was all a lie.”

I didn’t answer his questions. I was too busy looking at the boy looking into my room. He was staring at me with that look--there’s no way to describe that look. It just expresses love. He looked a little taller than me; he had one leg, and no hair. Yet, his face alone was beautiful. I knew that boys weren’t supposed to be beautiful, but that was what he was. I went home and started eating again. My mom gave me a time that I had to be home by, so I could eat dinner with them. I ate breakfast at home before school, and my mom packs my lunch.

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I had forgotten all about that boy. I didn’t even know his name. I knew that I was being desperate and that the secret admirer might not even be him. Although, it was worth a shot. I walked up to the front desk, where an old man was sitting.

I said to him, “I’m here to see someone. I don’t know his name, but he has one leg and no hair. He’s about my age.”

He said while giving me a visitor’s pass, “You must be thinkin’ of Carter Alstead. He’s in the chemo room which is on the fifth floor. Room 516.”

Carter Alstead. His name was so ordinary, yet magical. I didn’t even recognize who I was anymore. I didn’t take risks. I was the kind of girl who sits in the back of the class, not calling attention to herself. I walked down the hall and got into the elevator. I pressed the button for the fifth floor. My heart was racing and I couldn’t think straight. The doors opened and I stepped out. While I walked to the chemo room, I told myself that this was it. There was no turning back now.

I recognized him a soon as I walked into the room. Although he looked paler, weaker; yet, when he saw me he smiled a broad smile. He looked just as cute as I remembered, possibly even more.

He said, “Hi.”

I responded, “Hey. Are you my secret admirer.”

He responded very nervously and quietly, “Yeah. I knew that A Tree Grows in Brooklyn was your favorite book, because your mom brought it to the hospital.”

I blurted out, "I love you. Your notes were the nicest and most thoughtful notes I have received. I feel like you're the only one who cares about me."

That was very unusual. I'm not very expressive. It's not just because I'm quiet, but also because nobody cares how I feel. I knew that in order to keep Carter, I couldn't be myself.

He said, "I love you too, but I just wanted you to know. I can't let this go any further. The maximum amount of time that the doctor says I have left to live is five months."

My heart crumbled and I was on the verge of tears. I was planning to depend on him. He was the only person who cared about me and loved me. It was so unfair! He has less than a year to live. He couldn't die. He was too perfect. Take me instead. My life was worthless and nobody would care if I were gone.

We spent the whole night talking. By the time I left, it was eight. I knew that he was a mistake. Yet, he was so intelligent. So handsome. He was the peanut butter to my jelly. I could use a million different clichés, but no number, word, or space could express how much I needed him. I knew that life had given me a pleasure, but all pleasures go away. I could not indulge myself into the pleasures of life, because I would just be hurt in the end.

I didn't even know who I was anymore. The next day, I woke up early, called the school, pretended that I was my mother, and told them that I would be absent. Then, I got dressed and went to the hospital. I needed to spend every free moment I had with Carter, before he vanishes. I was Jekyll and Hyde. My other side was taking over. I never thought that I could be normal. Rebellious. However, I could be whoever I want to be if I tried hard enough. Anybody could change. They just need a person to change for.

He smiled as soon as I walked in his room.

He asked, "Don't you have school today?"

I replied, "I skipped it just for you."

He replied, "Well aren't I lucky. I never knew that you were so rebellious."

I said, "I'm not rebellious, I'm just sacrificial. Also, luck isn't getting what you want, it's surviving what you don't want. You should know that."

He said, "Well, I'm sorry that I didn't figure it out. However, I'm dying, not surviving. Perhaps that's why I didn't know that."

I always had done well in school. I actually enjoy it. However, I would rather spend the day talking to Carter. I could learn more in a day with Carter than in a month of school. Maybe he was smarter than me. Maybe he was a popular kid. That's the thing. We probably would have been invisible to each other if we were in the same school. However, now it doesn't matter. When I'm with Carter, all the stereotypes fall away. To him I'm the pretty girl, not the shy weird girl.

The day seemed to go by in a flash, but it felt like forever. It's like Carter can stop and speed up time. I couldn't tell you how many times we kissed. All of the sudden, at the end of the day, Carter passed out. I panicked. Could this be the end? It couldn't. How could it be the end when we had just begun? I couldn't go back to my old life. I didn't want to be the girl who sat quietly in the corner anymore. I wanted to be the rebellious girl who sacrificed her "good girl" reputation for Carter. So, I immediately pressed his call button. A group of nurses rushed into the room. I kept frantically asking if he would be okay, but no one would answer me. I didn't know that the best day of my life could become worse so quickly. I walked out of the room because I couldn't handle it. I had only known Carter for two days, but he was my everything. I struggled to remember his face, but it was fuzzy. I

needed to remember, I couldn't forget. I might never see his face again. I suddenly realized that it was dark outside. I checked my watch. It was 10:00. I couldn't leave. I had to stay here for Carter. My parents were probably going to yell at me, but I deserved it. A nurse came out of the room.

She told me, "You should probably go home."

I nodded. I didn't want to go. I had so many questions to ask her. Is he dead? What happened? I forced myself to turn around and leave. As soon as I was out of the building, I cried. I cried the hardest I had ever cried. More than when my grandpa died, or when I got the notes. When I started getting near my street, I saw the police. They were calling my name, like I was some lost puppy. They all were holding a poster of me. I froze. I didn't know what to do. Then, I ran. The police officers were chasing after me, begging me to stop. I didn't know what to do. I just ran. I ran and ran until I couldn't feel my legs anymore. I ran as fast as I ever ran in my whole life. I never realized that I could run that fast, but it wasn't me. It was purely my adrenaline. It had taken over, and my mind was no longer in control. I looked behind me. The police were nowhere in sight, yet I could still hear them yelling. I couldn't tell if it was really them, or if it was my mind simply replaying the noise. I couldn't tell what was real anymore. My phone buzzed, and it was Carter's number. The message was a group message and it read:

Hi. This is Nurse Brittany from Lakeway Hospital. I'm sorry to say that Carter has passed away. He fought his battle courageously, and he will always be remembered.

I was furious. What a joke! It wasn't a battle, it was a disease. Also, she won't remember him. He was just another cancer patient. He was just another person that they tried to heal, and failed terribly. They could have tried harder. Carter was my world, my entire life. It's impossible to live a life without Carter. So I ran into the forest, until I found a lake. I jumped. The water froze me to the very core.