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The Throne

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THE THRONE

I was king. King of the jungle-gym, king of the teeter-totter; the playground was my empire--and then you came along.

I remember all of the kids stopping and watching the enormous moving truck making it's way down our dirt road, passing the playground and stopping two blocks down, at the house right across the street from mine. They started unloading couches and mattresses and dressers. All of the children were entrance, except me. And then, out of the dust, came a little red sports car, bumping gaily up and down, and stopping in the driveway that the giant truck was now leaving. Suddenly, you hopped out of the car back hatch, like a martian exiting his spaceship but without the uncertainty. Your eyes were stern as you took in the little, red brick homes, and the perfectly manicured lawns. And then they ran toward you; all of my loyal peasants ran from their king to greet you.

In the years that flew past us, I hated you. You, who took my kingdom and turn it into a shambles, making all of the children envy you instead of me. You, who took out your garbage and cleaned up your room, something that my mother threw in my face every waking hour of my pitiful young life. But I was force to be congenial by my mother who called you "the new kid" for six years.

So, we played together, you and I, in what was slowly turning into your kingdom. You were quick and agile, and had an authority in your voice, all of which made my hatred grow hotter and hotter. All of the kids like watching you and occasionally I myself would find you quite fascinating, but the spell wouldn't last long.

Then one day the playground was having a wrestling match. Everyone wanted to wrestle you, although they new that they were in for certain defeat, but you came to me and pointed.

"You, will you wrestle me?" But it was more like a command then a question.

Everyone looked at me with envy in their eyes. I did not want to be made a fool of, but on the other hand, I couldn't risk my throne.

"Alright, tough guy, let's go." I said as I threw my dirty mop of hair away from my face.

I backed up a few paces and charged, lunging desperately at your stomach. You caught me and threw me down, but I squirmed by thin body free. Now you were going to play dirty, so you leapt into the air and landed just above me, your long arms and legs trapping me like a bird in a cage. Your face was very close to mine and you lowered yourself closer to me, like a vice, squeezing me, between you and the ground. Suddenly I didn't want to fight anymore, I just wanted to lie there in this warm place, next to you. But that feeling went just as quick as it came, and now it was taken over by fear and confusion, so I leapt up and ran home as quickly as possible.

Sweat was flowing from every pore in my body as I pushed that scene through my mind over and over again. None of it made sense. How could I possibly have felt that way when I hated you so much?

* * * * *

While the other girls were beginning to wear make-up and buy pretty clothes, I was playing baseball in dirty jeans and a scruffy, red cap, which held my long, stringy, brown hair wrapped up tight in a bun. All of the girls looked down their noses at me because I was so much different than they. They just couldn't understand why I wanted to be the only girl on an all-boy team. I never thought much of it. I had been brought up playing with boys. You and I on the same baseball team seemed no different to me than wrestling on the playground.

After our games were over, you would walk away from your position on third base and grab some cute cheerleader with perfectly blue-rimmed eyes and an innocent little apricot blush on her cheeks. It seemed to me that you had a new girl everyday. You were tall and had a stylish hair cut, and wore trendy clothes, but you still had the authority you had had that first day I saw you. Maybe that was why I still hated you so, or maybe it was because when you were walking down the hall with Jenny Newman, you would look at me, and flash your winning smile.

I was definitely an outcast, but you never stopped being nice to me. I assumed it was the type of congeniality you would give to any other team mate.

* * * * *

And then there was the night when we won the biggest game of the year. You went running of the field ahead of me, and I stood high on my toes to see what tonight's girl would look like. It was a ritual that occurred every night. You would walk away with some pretty girl; I would wonder what you saw in her and would try my hand at flirting with the other guys when you looked my way, but I was never very good, and your smile made me want to run home, just like I did when we were little. But tonight there was no girl, just you standing there next to the bleachers. I kept walking.

"Hi." Your blue eyes pierced me as I stopped to look at you. The rest of the team shuffled past us, shouting a very loud victory cry.

"Oh, hi." I said, trying to be very nonchalant. "Um, you played a great game tonight, that home run you made was terrific." I felt terribly uncomfortable standing there talking to you, so I reached down and twisted my damp jersey between my fingers.

"Thanks, you played great, too. I think everybody is pretty excited about winning."

We both looked down on our wriggling toes.

"You have a date tonight?" You asked.

"Me? No . . . not tonight." As if I had a date any night.

"Oh, well, I mean, I saw you with a couple other guys on the field, and I just assumed, . . ." you drifted off and turned your attention from my eyes back to your toes.

I was wondering why your authoritative voice seemed to be getting weaker. I had never seen you like this before; it frightened me, and sent a tingling feeling throughout my entire body.

"I know you've never liked me," you looked back up at me now, "but I've always . . . well, I guess I've always, cared about you."

"I like you . . ." I tried to catch myself before I could blurt out the rest, but it was too late. All of these feelings were bubbling up into my throat and forcing my tongue to spit them out, "I've always liked you, ever since that day you wrestled me on the playground."

"Really?" The authority was coming back now, stronger and more certain.

"But why didn't you ever tell me . . . , talk to me?"

"You were always with other girls, I never had the nerve, it didn't seem like I was your type. You always went out with cheerleaders and . . . well, I just never thought."

"I wish I'd gotten up the nerve to say something sooner." You pulled me up close to you and wrapped your arms around my waist, and I knew why I ran that day; everything shown perfectly clear. As you kissed me sweetly, my heart leapt, and the pleasure I felt seemed almost frightening.

* * * * *

So, I'm sitting here now throwing on some apricot blusher and a touch of blue eyeliner, my hair is curled and my clothes are clean and pressed. But, I'm really not doing it just for you, although I know it makes you happy, but I'm honestly doing for myself, because I'm realizing that I'm a girl, maybe you made me realize that. Maybe knowing that you love me just for me made me more like I am now, whatever it was, it makes me happy.

The doorbell just rang with quick little chime, and I jump up, knowing, of course, that it is you picking me up for our date. We're going to the wrestling match.

Tracy M. Peters