

Not Meant to Be

RUSSEL



"TAKE HIM, LANA," RUSSEL'S mother begged. "I can't bear to look at him another minute." Affliction thundered in her voice.

Her monstrous stare pierced Lana's soul. She harbored all anger and left no room for love, not for Russel, not for Lana, and not for herself. The only thing she yearned for was the men who paraded through the house each night and what they gave her. She had a love for sex and nothing else.

"He's your child, Alisha." Lana wilted as Alisha tossed the young boy to her.

A whimper escaped the toddler's mouth as Lana's hands caught him midair, her quick reflexes preventing a painful tumble to the ground. Russel's body trembled as Lana's arms wrapped around him, providing a source of comfort after a troubling time.

"He's the bane of my existence." Alisha lashed out. "He ruined my life! TAKE HIM."

Lana nestled the small child close to her heart. Her heart broke into shards when his large doe eyes looked up at her, full of fear and heartache.

"I will take him," Alisha breathed. "But I will never forgive you. Goodbye, Lana."

Lana spit on the ground as Alisha walked away. This wasn't the first time she walked away, but it would be the last.

Lana gently lowered Russel to the ground, her tone firm yet caring, as she directed him to stay put. When he was safe in his place, she shattered the window to her sister's car and removed the car seat from the back seat. After fixing the car seat into place, she buckled in the small child she would come to love as her own.

The young child was lost in a sea of thoughts. He wondered why his mother handed him to a strange lady. *He wondered why Mommy didn't love him.* Most of all, he wondered what life would be like if she were different. The world looked different to him today. Not that he had seen the outside world. His mother kept him locked away. A prisoner. It was always dark where he slept. He remembered always being hungry and sleeping on a puppy pad on the floor. His mother was constantly screeching. Never once saying a nice thing to the little boy she birthed a few short years ago.

Russel snapped back into the present. The sound of the tires on the gravel road soothed him. He enjoyed the wind as it enveloped him through the small cracks in the window. He may have had a car seat, but Mommy never took him anywhere. The car ride was a different experience for him; he couldn't remember the last time he had been in a car.

Under the shroud of a dark veil covering the

evening sky, flashes of lightning flickered in the distance as a young Russel glanced out the window of an unfamiliar car accompanied by a woman he did not recognize. Tears cascaded down his cheeks as he departed from his home, drifting further from his mother.

He was barely three years old, and his mother had given up on him; she handed him off to the sister that she never loved. She rinsed her hands clean of having a child as quickly as she could. Despite her shortcomings as a mother, she was the only mother Russel had ever known. As the distance grew between Russel and the only place he knew, he could feel his heart shatter into billions of little pieces.

Lana looked back at the small boy and smiled. "It will be okay, Russel."

Russel gazed back at her, the words not fully registering in his mind.

It wasn't long before the car came to a stop. Lana ran around the car and unbuckled the small boy from his seat. She placed him on the ground and grabbed his hand. The rain drenched the two of them as they rushed toward the door to Lana's home. Once inside, the warmth of the house and the scent of blackberry pie flooded Russel's senses. These were things he had never seen or smelled in his home.

Russel came to love his aunt, though he knew her as Mama. They spent years learning and growing together. The young boy brought so much joy to Lana's life. The scars of his past still gripped him tightly, but Lana was always there to wipe the tears

from his eyes.

Until she wasn't.

When Russel turned fourteen, he woke up to an empty home and a letter

My beloved Russel,

It pains me deeply that I couldn't stay by your side. My inner demons have resurfaced, and despite my efforts, they've taken control once more. There's a secret I've kept hidden from you, a weight that's grown heavier with time. These pain medications meant to ease my suffering have become a crutch I can't let go of. I didn't want you to witness me unraveling, to see how they've ensnared me in their grip.

Please know that this struggle is mine alone, and it's not a burden you should bear. You have your own journey ahead, one filled with promise and opportunity. Hold onto your dreams, cherish each moment, and know that my love for you is everlasting.

With all my heart,

Mama

Russel spent three years roaming the streets, scrounging food from dumpsters to survive. The streets toughened the frail boy he once was. His trauma was buried deep. The tough bravado masked the scars that would haunt him until the day he died. He was filled with anger and pain, and these emotions consumed him.

Until she came along...

Lacy was a sweet and innocent fourteen-year-old girl. Russel knew he had to have her from the moment he laid eyes on her. Her blonde hair swayed in the breeze, and her bright eyes were illuminated by the sun. Her smile, though, was what captured Russel's attention. Her teeth were pearl white and perfect. Every inch of the girl was a gift from the gods.

"Hi," Lacy giggled as Russel approached her.

He greeted her with a bold gesture, his hand moving to caress her face. His touch was gentle yet firm as he swept a stray lock of blonde hair away from her eyes, revealing the wanton need radiating from his pores. It was an instant connection, his actions speaking of both admiration and a desire to sweep her off her feet. "Hi," Russel whispered. "I'm Russel."

"Lacy," she exhaled, her voice trembling with a mixture of longing and uncertainty. Her eyelashes fluttered, betraying the bundle of nerves that fired off in her body. It was a name spoken with a weight of emotion, revealing the growing bond that was being nurtured between them.

"Let's take a walk," Russel smiled as he laced his fingers with hers.

"Oh, okay," Lacy's cheeks flushed as her fingers tightened around his.

A boy had never held her hand before. Especially not an older boy, a boy who could scorch the sun with his smoldering looks and bad-boy smile. Lacy swooned as they walked hand in hand toward a bench in the center of Neverland Park.

"I love this park," Lacy exclaimed softly, her voice filled with genuine admiration as she scanned the field of flowers surrounding her.

Turning back to Russel, her gaze softened with a subtle smile, showing not just her love for the park but also the embers kindling within their hearts.

"Me too," Russel admitted. "I've spent many nights here."

"Nights?" Lacy inquired, her tone curious and inviting.

"I have a dark past," Russel's shoulders slumped as he spoke. But when he looked into her eyes, his demeanor shifted. "But I can see a brighter future ahead of me."

Lacy smiled as a sigh escaped her lungs. She thought she was in love. Her heart raced as Russel leaned in for a kiss. Russel could tell she had never been kissed before, but he would never forget the sweet flavor of her cherry-red lips. As his tongue explored each corner of her mouth, he felt as though time had stopped.

She was the one.

They went on countless dates. They laughed together and enjoyed each other's company. One evening, Russel pulled her by the hand and led her to a small secluded section of Fairy Beach. A place he knew they would never be discovered. He watched her eyes light up as they stepped under the broken bridge. When they stopped, he pulled her in for a kiss that would lead to a new level of their relationship.

It was no surprise that sex was the only thing he could think about.

He kissed her with a fervor that was unlike any other kiss they had had. As his lips tugged at hers, his supple fingertips paraded up her abdomen to her ribcage until it found its way to her breast. Instead of pulling away like he thought she would, Lacy pushed herself into him, letting a soft groan emanate from her throat.

He rolled her nipple between his fingertips as his cock grew rock hard. His hunger for her grew deeper; he needed to be inside her; he needed her wrapped around him, gripping him with her tight walls.

It wasn't long before they were pulling clothes off and exploring every inch of each other's bodies. The night was perfect. Making love under the stars was everything the both of them had dreamed of.

"I love you, Lacy." Russel caressed her cheek as he fell into her almond eyes.

Lacy let out a slight giggle, "I love you, too, Russel."

The lovers spent two beautiful years together. The third year changed everything. Lacy ran away and went to spend her life with the one she loved. Russel often brought home different drugs.

Their home was a dark alleyway in the rough parts of Neverland.

He took anything to give him the high he so desired. Something changed in him. She began to witness the demons of his past, each high bringing back

horrid memories. Russel would rage at the flip of a switch. With turbulent eyes, he would fly at Lacy, pummeling her while he cried about the woman who hurt him most. His aunt.

Piercing screams tore through the stillness of the alleyway, their echoes bouncing off the surrounding walls. Each cry carried a distinct tone of terror and desperation, sending chills down the spine of anyone within earshot. "WHY DID YOU LEAVE ME," he hollered at Lacy.

"I'm standing in front—" Lacy managed before he pushed her to the ground.

"I trusted you, and you deserted me, Aunt Lana." His voice cracked as he cried out, the sound cutting through the tense silence of the alleyway.

No matter how bruised and broken she was, Russel was thankful that she stood by his side. When he would snap out of his flashbacks, he would hold her and cry, apologizing until they fell asleep in each other's arms. The love they shared was toxic, but neither of them knew any better.

Everything was perfect, or so they thought, until it wasn't.

Lacy pulled him aside one day as they walked hand in hand down the cobblestone streets of Neverland. The words that fell out of her mouth made Russel sick to his stomach.

"I'm pregnant, Russel." She giggled, rubbing her swollen abdomen. She brought her hands just underneath her navel in the shape of a heart.

They were merely teenagers, caught in the throes of youth and rebellion. Russel fiercely clung to his carefree existence, refusing to let go. His desire for freedom burned within him like an unquenchable flame, driving him to seek refuge in the euphoria of whatever drugs he could get his hands on. Days blurred into nights as he chased fleeting moments of escape, unaware of the consequences looming on the horizon.

"WHAT," Russel exploded, running his finger through his hair. Beads of sweat could be seen forming on his forehead.

"We're having a baby," Lacy whispered, her voice tinged with hope and vulnerability. She reached out to touch his face, only to have him pull away, leaving her with feelings of shock and abandonment.

"Fuck," his bloodshot eyes stared at the ground. He stomped off, leaving Lacy to cry alone.

Russel found relief in finding his friends and getting high. He spent less and less time with Lacy. He had hoped that if he didn't see her, the baby would disappear, and they could go back to the way they were. The feeling of powder shooting up his nose brought him peace. The feeling that followed left him floating on cloud nine.

Russel repeated the same ritual day after day, only returning home after he couldn't handle doing any more drugs. He stumbled off to bed, hardly saying two words to the woman he said he loved. Lacy spent many nights crying to herself, wishing life was different. Her dream would never come true, though. Russel had turned into a monster. He

didn't want a child, and he didn't want her either.

Her stomach continued to grow, and a small child formed in her womb. Russel seemed disgusted by the sight of her. He refused to touch her, refused to kiss her, and wanted anything but to be around her. The alleyway they lived in was a tense place.

Russel returned from snorting piles of ecstasy and cocaine to find a puddle of blood on the ground. Lacy was nowhere to be seen. His heightened stupor from the drugs left him dumbfounded until he heard the sounds of a small child behind him.

Life took a drastic turn after that day. They somehow managed to scrape together enough money for an apartment. Lacy devoted herself to caring for their small child, whom she named Peter Pan. Meanwhile, Russel worked long hours, often not returning home until late at night.

When he came home, he was high. Some things never changed...