

THE ALLURE OF
Destiny



Ed Vaughn

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ISBN: 978-1-4834-8013-8 (sc)

ISBN: 978-1-4834-8012-1 (e)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018901139

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Lulu Publishing Services rev. date: 02/02/2018



An Introduction to Infatuation

The Nerf ball softly touched the ceiling and came back to its sender lying on the bed. Mark was fixated on a little dust clump on the ceiling. The objective of this mindless game was to hit the dust clump enough to make it disappear from the ceiling. In a sense, it was a fourteen-year-old's way of tidying his room. Time was not an issue. Nor was the dreadful appearance of his bedroom. After all, supper wasn't for a couple of hours.

"Mark, are you in there?" Josh asked as he rapped on the door. "I need to talk to you for a sec."

Mark slowly opened his bedroom door. He positioned himself in the partial two-foot opening. Blocking the entrance, he asked, "What do you want?"

"Let me in, lamebrain," Josh replied as he pushed Mark aside and marched into the room. "Man, do you ever straighten up this crap? It's like a locker room in here." Searching for a place to sit, he grabbed some clothes, a backpack, and the Nerf ball out of the chair and tossed them on the floor. "Are you ready for tomorrow?"

"If you mean school, yeah, I guess," Mark responded, grabbing the Nerf ball and pitching it in the air, playing catch with himself. "It's no big deal."

"It is a big deal, idiot. Let me see your folder and schedule. You did

fill out that information, didn't you? Mom wanted me to make sure you did it right."

"Just because you're my brother doesn't make you my boss. It's only the first day of school," Mark shot back.

"Hey, pea brain. Just the first day of *high school*. You don't have a clue. I'm trying to keep your butt out of trouble. If you really don't give a shit, then cool. I'm out of here," Josh said as he got up and started for the door, shaking his head in disgust.

"Wait! Ah, here's my folder," Mark said, not making eye contact with Josh. "I haven't looked at it yet. It can't be that tough to figure out."

"I figured as much. Mark, I'm only trying to spare you from some of the stupid mistakes I made a couple of years ago. High school sucks. If you listen to me, it'll suck less."

As they were going through his class schedule, Josh observed, "I'm glad you took Mrs. Hadley's English class as your first class. It's so hard to stay awake in that class. You'll have your best shot early in the day."

Mark offered a slight grin. At least he had done something right.

Josh closed the folder and laid it on the bed. He looked Mark in the eye and said, "In the morning, use the rear stairway next to the gym to your first class. The seniors won't be there. You can avoid a lot of their hazing. If you do get caught by some seniors, just suck it up and let them do whatever. It won't last."

Mark nodded. Even though he didn't say anything to Josh, he appreciated the advice. His comfort level with new things wasn't high, and most of the time he struggled with unfamiliar circumstances.

"One more thing, brother. At school, unless it's an emergency, don't talk to me. I won't talk to you. If we're seen together, we both could be red meat. Capiche?"

"What's 'capiche'? Is that some sort of code?" Mark inquired, totally lost.

"*Understand*. It means, do you understand," Josh explained, exasperated. Mark could see it in Josh's face; the time for civil brotherly communication and bonding was over.

Alone in his room, Mark glanced at the papers once more and checked his schedule. He picked up his backpack and emptied the junk from last year onto his bed. He stuffed the empty backpack with some

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supplies and the papers for tomorrow. Looking for a place to lay it, the unexpected idea to straighten up his room crossed his mind. Quickly, he rejected the thought and dropped the backpack on the floor.

At supper, their mom asked, “Do you boys have everything you need for school tomorrow?”

Josh made a half grunt, and Mark nodded.

“I’m not concerned about you, Josh. But Mark, you’re going to find out that high school is different from junior high.”

“Don’t worry, Mom. Everything’s cool,” Mark reassured her as he gave Josh a quick glance. “Josh helped me get ready.”

“It’s cool, Mom. He’s on top of it,” Josh chimed in with a hearty slap on Mark’s back.



It was a beautiful August day in Anderson, Indiana. Mark was growing up in the atmosphere of family values, hard work, and strong character. The 1967--68 school year was beginning in this middle-class town of fifty thousand, and the buzz was for the first day of school. Anderson High School was where Mark’s parents had attended and Josh currently attended. Now Mark was joining the nine hundred students.

When Mark slipped around the side of the building, he could see that students had shown up early this first morning. The seniors had already begun the annual custom of hazing the freshmen. Mark made his way to the back of the gym and started up the stairway. Halfway up, he was startled by loud rings of a bell system indicating classes were beginning. He would be late for his first class.

The stillness of the corridor was abruptly disturbed. “Do you know which room is Mrs. Baily’s math class?” asked a boy trailing behind Mark.

Startled, Mark spun around and saw the confused freshman. Now he didn’t feel alone in the stupidity department. The freshman’s hair still had patches of shaving cream, and his shirt was mis-buttoned by two button holes. “Sorry, man, I haven’t got a clue.” Mark realized that without Josh’s help, this boy could have been him.

As he approached Mrs. Hadley’s room, he was relieved he hadn’t gotten caught by the seniors. Josh had given him good advice. He just

needed to survive until graduation, when he would receive the diploma that would allow him to work in the same auto-accessory factory as his father.

Arriving at the classroom, he took a deep breath, gently opened the door, and attempted to slither in. He avoided eye contact with the teacher. A quick scan didn't produce any empty seats in the back of the room. He closed the door with his right hand, flinching as it made a loud click.

"Young man, are you supposed to be in my freshman English class?" asked Mrs. Hadley as she strode toward him. "What's your name?"

"Yes, ma'am. I'm assigned to your class. Ah, my name is Mark Kelly." He was trying to use his best manners and deflect attention from himself. "Sorry I'm late. Where should I sit?" he asked.

Josh had warned him that Mrs. Hadley had been teaching in Anderson for years. She was a no-nonsense, by-the-book teacher who taught discipline as much as English. Trying to get on her good side would have to wait until he got off her bad side.

"Mr. Kelly, take that seat in the third row," she told him, pointing to a vacant seat. "Be ready to get involved in the class. You've caused enough disturbance this morning."

"Yes, ma'am."

The walls in the room were bare and painted a drab light green. In the two front corners stood an American flag and a state flag of Indiana. Walking to the empty seat, he noticed everyone looking at him. One of the guys smiled at him and gave him a thumbs-up. A girl gave him an approving smile as he walked past her. Being the center of attention made it an awkward moment. This was not the entrance he had envisioned. At the old, marked-up desk, he opened his English book and tried to disappear as the class resumed.

Mark glanced around the room at the other students as the teacher droned. His gaze stopped at the girl next to him. Something about her captured his curiosity. She was cute, but that wasn't it. Her long brunette hair was nice, and he was enamored by her clear complexion. His stare was fixated on her.

Suddenly she turned toward him, and they made eye contact. "What are you staring at?" she whispered with a glare.

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Sheepishly he fumbled around with his book and meekly responded, “Nothing...really.”

When the class was over, one of the guys in the class approached him. “Hey, Mark, I’m Kenny. Man, I felt for you when she drilled you for being late.”

“Yeah, it was pretty gross. Not the way to start high school.”

“Hey, man, you handled it good. I was glad it wasn’t me. Ah, listen, if you want to hang out some time, it’s cool by me.”

“Yeah, Kenny, I’ll see you tomorrow.” Mark scanned the room to see if the girl sitting next to him was still there. She was gone, so he made his way to his next class. He checked as he went to each class, but the girl from English was never present. Finally the first day was over.

All the way home, he thought about the girl and tried to figure out why he was so attracted to her. He couldn’t get her image out of his mind. He liked the way she looked at him, even when she caught him staring. Before this morning, no girl had ever looked at him before. Within two blocks of his house, he slowed his pace and then stopped. It suddenly occurred to him that he had never really looked at a girl before, especially a girl his age.



The next day Mark was early for Mrs. Hadley’s class. Most of the class hadn’t arrived yet. He looked around the room for the girl from yesterday. There she was, walking down the aisle. Nervously he watched her take her seat. “Hi, my name is Mark,” he blurted out the moment she made eye contact. This infatuation was making him do things totally foreign from a day before.

She looked at him. “I know, you told us yesterday when you were late.”

He slumped and rolled his eyes in embarrassment.

She smiled at his reaction and continued, “My name is Anna. Anna Collins.”

Her voice and smile made him oblivious to his surroundings. He didn’t fully understand what was happening. Being a teenage boy, Mark had always noticed pretty girls, but never really talked to them. Something about Anna was different.