



Proudly Presents

27 DOLLS

WRITTEN BY LELAND FAULKNER

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If you don't like love stories, you might want to leave. Now. Seriously. This is not just a love story. This is THE love story. It's more romantic than Romeo and Juliet. It's more passionate than Anthony and Cleopatra. It's bigger than Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. I should know. This love story—is mine.

When my father got a transfer, he packed up the family and moved us to West Virginia. It's hard enough to be the new kid in school, but it's murder if you miss the entire first six weeks. It was the middle of October, and already the seasons were changing. The once beautiful, lush green foliage was now turning into the warmer tones and vibrant hues of a fast-approaching Autumn.

I met her in one of my classes. Well, I shouldn't say that I met her. You would actually have to converse first in order to officially say you'd met someone. I saw her—to be exact—that first day in my English Literature class. I didn't know what I'd say if we ever actually did meet, but I wanted to be prepared. I overheard my sister talking on her cell-phone to one of her best friends from back home. My sister was telling this friend about an article she'd read in one of her many teen magazines. After eavesdropping on the one-sided conversation, I gathered that the article suggested giving a gift to someone you might be too shy to approach. I should add here that—I'm shy. Painfully shy. I've even had teachers call my parents and ask them if I am a mute. My sister was urging her friend to give her unrequited love a package of baseball cards or an unopened pack of chewing gum. After much deliberation, I started to warm-up to the idea of giving a gift as an ice-breaker.

Now the hard part. What could I offer as a small token of my affection? What do girls like? Flowers? Chocolates? Finally, it hit me. It was so obvious. Dolls! What girl doesn't like dolls? I went to the local dollar store, and I was amazed at the assortment of dolls from which to choose—two! The choice was between a somewhat plush looking cuddle doll—called Cuddle Doll—and a plastic rip-off Barbie called Bridget. Since cuddling was the optimum goal for project Boy-Buys-Doll-Boy-Gets-Girl-End-Of-Story! I purchased

said doll and securely placed her in my backback. Just in case. Piper—that’s her name—sees me walking home from school one day. It ends up that she lives only three blocks from my house. I love listening to the sound of Piper’s voice. Apparently, she does, as well! Piper talks about everything! Elections, favorite foods, how she’s been a vegetarian for the past two-and-a-half years. She talks about the weather, names her favorite sports teams and even tells me why they’re her favorite. As we stroll down the historic sidewalks of Charleston, Piper makes a point to show me all of the local landmarks. I realize that she is still in high school, but Piper would make an excellent tour guide!

Whoever said, “Love is eternal, when it blooms in the springtime,” has never walked down a sidewalk with his first real crush—absorbing every word that comes out of her smiling face—while surrounded by the beauty of Autumn. The oranges, reds and yellows that framed the tree-lined streets provided a magnificent backdrop for the contrasting color of her dark-brown hair.

When we get to her house—three blocks past mine, mind you—Piper ends our trek with an observation. She looks at me and says, “You don’t say much. Do you?” I just reached into my backpack, pulled out the Cuddle doll, and handed it to her. Piper took it—studied it for a second—then hugged me and ran inside. I just stood there for a few seconds—savoring the moment—then ran to the dollar store and bought another Cuddle Doll! Do you want to know what I did before I went to sleep that night? I thanked my sister.

Project Boy-Buys-Doll-Boy-Gets-Girl-End-Of-Story is a huge success! Piper and I become inseparable. We walk to school together. We walk home together. We do our homework together. We have practically all of the same classes, same teachers—just different periods. It only makes sense that we do our homework together. After all, the only time I get to see Piper during the day is fourth period in English Literature class.

Not a week passes that I don’t give Piper a doll.