Not Too Late

Looking at the lonely angel standing prayerfully on top of the pure marble stone, he placed the scarlet roses still filled with life at her feet. He felt as if the beautiful stone figure was watching his every move. Beyond that, he even felt that she was seeing into his mind. It reminded him of the true angel who was peacefully at rest beneath the roses he had just placed. That little reminder was like a key to a flood of memories locked up in his mind. As he rode out the flood, he gave the concrete angel something to see...

It was the summer right after junior year, and he was kicking it off nicely by getting invited to all the major parties, and okay, crashing a few. The parties were always filled with awesome music turned to its loudest, spiked drinks, games of beer-pong, and lots of chicks; just the way he liked it. His main man’s party was by far the best though. Joey always threw the wildest parties. The cops actually got called six times; a record! But that wasn’t the real reason it was his favorite. It was because of Jenna. He knew she was special from the moment he saw her. With a quiet beauty she couldn’t conceal but refused to show off, she was different from the rest. She was so impossibly stunning that he couldn’t even think of a word to describe her beauty. Her hair was like the colors of the leaves in the fall, like the rich golden colors you see painted in the sky at sunrise, and it all fell in perfect spirals past the length of her shoulders.

Not realizing he had been staring for so long or that he had been caught staring, he was startled when Joey came up to him saying, “Man, you better close your mouth and stop that drooling; you’re gonna drown yourself in it!”

He jumped. “Jeez Joey! Don’t do that to me, dude.”

Joey snickered. “So who are those puppy dog eyes aimed at? She needs to get you on a leash. You look lost.”

“I wish I knew. She’s the really pretty girl over there, do you see her?” he said, getting lost in her beauty again.

“Really, man? All the chicks here are hot! You’re going to have to be more specific,” the amused Joey stated.

Exasperated, he just pointed.
Joey followed his annoyed friend’s finger. “Oh, the babe hanging around that Asian chick? That’s Jenna Bryan.”

A smile played on his face as he matched the name to his mystery girl.

Joey continued on as he realized he was about to lose his friend again, “You know what? I’m gonna play cupid here and introduce you two.” Before he could stop him, Joey had already sauntered up to Jenna and the Asian and pointed straight at him.

Face red, hands clammy, he met the girl of his dreams as Joey came back and introduced them. “Jenna, this is Andrew Broke. Andrew this is Jenna Bryan,” Cupid said. “Nice to meet you,” said the sweetest voice he had ever heard.

“More than nice,” the thought slipped from Andrew’s mouth with a sigh. Realizing this, he blushed all over again. In reply she gave the most dazzling smile from the most perfect lips that were so deep a red, a rose would be jealous. It lit up the whole room. He couldn’t help but to get caught up in it and smile back.

“Well I’m going to awkwardly leave now. You two kids behave and try not to have too much fun without me,” Joey interrupted with a wink and a flirty smile.

He shook his head at Joey; his friend was never afraid to be his annoying self. Turning his attention back to her he asked, “So are you enjoying the party?”

“I’m having a pretty good time actually.” Then she admitted guiltily, “My friend forced me to come to this.”

“Well I’m glad you came,” he said with not his usual confidence.

“Me, too,” she replied with that smile of hers.

Getting more nervous by the second he stuttered, “Um, do you want, uh um, a drink or something?” Before she could answer he plowed on, “I’ll go get you one.”

She gave a polite smile, “Thank you, a drink would be nice.”

Annoyed with himself he walked away muttering, “That was slick, Rick. Stutter much? Ugh…” I’ll make up for it; I just need to collect myself. Now what was it she wanted? He thought as he gave a shrug to his shoulders and grabbed a variety of drinks.

Walking back, drinks in hand, he stopped short as he saw the scene that was unfolding. Some guy was up in Jenna’s beautiful, tear-streaked face arguing with her. It was when her perfect face was pushed to the floor, though, that he lost all control. A white hot anger drove him like nothing else had before. In seconds he was on top of the coward assaulting his girl. This caught the guy by surprise, but he quickly caught on to what was happening, when Andrew received two full-blown punches to the face. Luckily a couple of big guys came to break it up with the urging of Joey, before another heavy punch met his throbbing and now bleeding face. He wasn’t through with him though; he literally wanted to wrap his fingers around the coward’s neck and not let go. But Andrew’s thoughts were cut off abruptly, his mind totally blank, for the sole reason that she had walked up to him. She
gracefully placed a gentle hand on his face and swept worried eyes over him. As one single tear escaped the hold her eyes had, he reached out and wiped it away. “Let’s get out of here,” he told her.

They went out the back door that led to the beach. Walking down the shore line side by side feeling the sand on their toes, they shared the beautiful night. Everything was illuminated by the light of the moon and by the few stars that shone through the overcast sky. There were no sounds besides waves lapping onto the shore and the wind as it blew through the trees. It was serene in every sense of the word, especially since he was sharing this scene with her. She looked breath-taking as the wind tugged at her hair which seemed to glow in the moonlight. All of her seemed to glow under this light. And as he stopped and turned towards her, holding her in his arms, he looked deep into her blue eyes that were like the deepest part of the ocean. He then let himself drown in them as his whole world exploded when his lips met hers, and he hoped he would never resurface again.

Big drops of rain brought them back. Grabbing her hand, they ran to the cover of the trees just as the rain came down harder. “Did you have a nice shower?” he gloated, being the dryer of the two.

“I don’t know, you tell me,” she playfully said catching him off guard as she squeezed the water out of her hair and onto his head.

He pulled her down off her feet as he playfully held her. She giggled out of surprise.

He laughed, “It was refreshing.”

“Good, because you needed it!” she pretended to plug her cute, freckled-filled nose.

“Not as much as some people…” he hinted. She gave him a playful hit that got snatched out of the air and held prisoner by him. “This is mine now,” Andrew smirked.

“Fine, go ahead and keep it.” She shrugged.

“I will, but I’m going to keep this too.” He leaned in for another earth-shattering kiss that left him high. “And you’re definitely not getting them back from me.

“I’m a package deal you know,” she said settling into his arms.

“That’s what I was hoping for,” he softly replied as she laid her head on his shoulder. As the rain continued to relentlessly pour, they sat nestled with each other under the shelter of the tree drifting into sleep equivalent to heaven.

Warmth penetrated through him as the sun spread its rays out for another day. Another day with Jenna, he thought with a big smile spreading across his face. As he turned toward the reason of his happiness, a frown replaced the smile when he didn’t see her. Shaking off the immediate disappointment, Andrew made his way back to Joey’s house.

“Late night?” Joey’s raised eyebrows and lopsided grin inquired.
“It wasn’t that kind of night, you perv,” he chuckled. “But man, Joey, it was great.” He shook his head at the memory, warmth bubbling through him. “It’s just… we just… clicked,” Andrew struggled for words. “I mean, it’s like we were meant to be.”

“Okay, forget whipped, someone had a dose of estrogen today!” Joey’s face was a mixture of amusement and horror. Andrew shot him a look. “Come on, Man, really. ‘It’s like we were meant to be?’ Next thing you know you’ll cry over the movie *Notebook* and drive a Prius.” Joey trembled.

“Oh shut up. Even if I was, I could take your wimp-self any day!”

“I’m terrified. Please don’t run me over with that Prius!” Joey said laughing at his mockery.

“Ha-ha aren’t you the comedian,” Andrew said laughing, but he grew serious when he saw the stain on the carpet where he’d spilled the drinks the previous night. “That guy last night, who was he?”

“Drake Klimalus, the biggest jerk you’ll ever meet. Andrew you have to be careful. He holds a serious grudge.” The worry etched into Joey’s face made the warning even more ominous sounding. It kept replaying in his mind all the way home.

Screwed, that’s the word that came to mind when he saw his mom’s arms crossed, zeroing in on him as he unsuccessfully tried to sneak in. Her narrowed slits for eyes froze the pre-made excuses on his tongue. And the finality of the dreaded G-word made him upgrade his vocabulary to damned.

Time gets grounded with you, or so he was learning as the hands on the clock took excruciatingly slow turns. Six days, twenty-two hours, and eighteen minutes he counted down until his freedom. *At least it’s four minutes less than the last time I checked,* he thought with agony. A text from Joey interrupted his thoughts. Reading it, an ornery smile played on his face, and he started a new count down; he was breaking out tonight.

The heist went as planned, well almost. Joey, AKA the getaway driver, showed up on time, but almost compromised their mission with his big mouth. “Romeo, Romeo, let down your hair,” he had yelled to Andrew’s window.

“Keep it down!” Andrew laughed. “Anyways, you’re thinking of Rapunzel not Romeo,” he said after climbing down his window.

“Sorry, my fair lady,” Joey mocked with a curtsy.

At the party a couple of local college guys were throwing, he tried to let himself relax, but couldn’t. Aside from this party not being his usual scene, he also found that Jenna and Joey’s new flavor of the week, Lauren, had come too. Dividing the stoned kids like Moses divided the Red Sea, he caught up to them. “I think we should go,” Andrew said leveling his eyes at Jenna. “It’s not safe.”

“Man, I’m sorry. I didn’t know it would be like this,” Joey said as he walked up.
“You’re fine. Let’s just get out of here. I have a bad feeling.” Joey nodded his head, serious for once. “I’ll go pull the car up. You wait with them,” he told Joey.

I might need to get a boat instead, he thought as he walked straight into the down-pour toward Joey’s car. The bad feeling in the pit of his stomach began to rise. It felt as if a fist was clenching his lungs. He could swear that someone was watching him. Nervously he turned, only to find desertedness. “No one’s there,” he reassured himself. But just then he heard the screeching of tires rip through the silence. Then he saw the truck that was barreling his way. Like a deer in headlights, Andrew was frozen with fear. The only part of him that seemed to be working was his mind that was running a mile a minute, flashing scenes of his life before his eyes. Everything was in slow motion; the car as it hurled towards him inch by inch, and even the rain slowed. No matter how hard he tried, he just couldn’t get his legs to move. This was a nightmare come true, so he prayed. The last thing he remembered was someone pushing him. Falling, he saw a terrified angel, and then the darkness swallowed him up.

Red and white light flashed around him. Confusion filled his dazed mind. He watched as the mute world came back to focus and reality came crashing down on him as paramedics surrounded him. Jenna. His throat started to close in and the darkness threatened to come back again. Fighting it off, he swiped at the probing hands blocking him. Jenna. He couldn’t move quickly enough. “Jenna!” His urgent thoughts formed to a word as he broke free of strangers’ grips. His crazed eyes took in the scene as he searched for the only thing that mattered to him. “Jenna…” Running to her, Andrew held her in his arms. “Why?” The question was whispered through his tears.

Her reply was a weak smile and a fragile yet graceful finger pointing softly at him. She said, the smile weakening, “I love you, Andy. I’m going to miss you.”

“Don’t talk like that! Jenna, everything’s going to be okay. You’re going to be okay.” “Shh,” she cut off his reassurances and kissed him. He looked deep into the light that was fading in her eyes. She stroked his face, wiping away his tears. Closing her eyes, her hands lost their grip. Then her whole body went limp, leaving only her smile.

“Jenna, wake up! This isn’t funny!” He shook her body. “Jenna!” He could distantly hear someone’s cries for help, and then realized they were his own. Andrew’s whole body shook with blood-chilling sobs. When the darkness came to greet him, he welcomed it. The angel’s face haunted his dreams. There was a look of pure terror in her eyes, Jenna’s eyes. Jenna had been the unknown answer to his prayers; his guardian angel. But her terror had been for him, driven by the need to protect him. And why? Because she loved him? He shook his head at the thought. If you really loved me Jenna, you wouldn’t have done that and left me, he thought bitterly with cold hate mixing with his guilt. Cold, black hate; like the dark hole that was his heart. All he seemed to see was this cold blackness. People were dressed in
it. The sky was dressed in it. And the unearthed ground was dressed in it. It was the same ground that buried his life, his Jenna.

Pain sliced through him, cutting off his long ago memories. It was hard for him to remember that emptiness, guilt, and especially hatred that had eaten away at the part of him that had survived Jenna’s death. He had been a walking corpse, spending the days that seemed to never end lost in a fog. Andrew couldn’t remember when he had found his way out or when exactly he had unlocked the cage of guilt and hate he’d been in. But when he had, he found himself following that long ago path that led to her grave; past all the other stones marking someone else’s life, love, pain and death, past the other stories he would never know. He wasn’t through with his own story though. Jenna gave her life so he could live his; his life had been her last wish. It’s not too late, he thought. He would live his life to the fullest and remember the happy memories they’d shared. It’s not too late. The thought kept ringing in his head. It’s not too late, it’s not too late, it’s not too late…

The angel smiled down on him.