

DADDY'S LITTLE GIRL

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. WOODED ROAD - NIGHT

TOMMY MILLER (18) glances behind him in a panic as a truck's headlights seem to chase him. The vehicle's type is hidden behind the lights. Both sides of the road are lined densely with trees.

TOMMY

Oh Jesus.

The truck's engine revs as it closes in on Tommy. He looks back and panics even more. A split in the trees comes up on his right. He dives into the space, a moment before the truck would have struck him.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Tommy attempts to run full-speed but that's impossible with so many trees in his way. He ducks into hiding behind a tree and fights to calm his breathing.

O.S. Footsteps approach.

Tommy sits frozen as he listens in terror. Curiosity drives him to peer around the tree. Something he sees alarms him and he takes off running.

NEARBY

Tommy is more focused on the area behind him than where he is going. He fails to see the steep incline until he steps off the edge and topples down it.

RAVINE

Tommy violently topples down the side of a small ravine. He barely misses the trees in his path.

AT THE BOTTOM

Tommy comes to an abrupt stop when his head strikes a small boulder. Eyes frozen open in terror, he lies motionless. Blood trickles from a head wound down the rock under him.

AT THE TOP

We see the back of a man in a jacket with the hood pulled up as he stands at the edge of the ravine and stares at the body lying at the bottom.

The figure turns away and moves out of sight.

O.S. The sound of a truck door closing, followed by a truck driving away.

EXT. JACKSON HOUSE - DAY

A nice two-story home in suburbia with a two-car garage. A mail truck approaches, stopping at each mailbox on the road.

NOAH JACKSON (early 40s) whistles a happy tune as he goes to his mailbox, where he greets MAILMAN just as he arrives.

MAILMAN

Good afternoon, Noah.

Noah is especially chipper.

NOAH

It's certainly a beautiful day.

Mailman peels a few letters from his stack.

MAILMAN

Looks like Zoey got another college response. That girl's going places.

Mailman hands the letters to Noah, who already looks through them.

NOAH

She's very excited to choose a school.

MAILMAN

And you, you'll be an empty nester soon.

Noah looks up, barely hiding a sneer.

NOAH

They all have to leave the nest sometime, don't they?

MAILMAN

(joking)

I wish mine would leave sooner than later.

Noah turns serious.

NOAH

Appreciate them while you can. They grow up the moment you turn your back.

MAILMAN  
See you tomorrow.

Mailman moves on to the next house.

Noah walks to his porch, studying one letter in particular.

INSERT - LETTER

It's addressed to Zoey Jackson, from The Ohio State University.

INT. JACKSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Noah enters. He lays the mail down, except for Zoey's letter. He opens it and reads to himself.

INSERT - LETTER

The letter notifies Zoey that she has been accepted into Ohio State. She has five days to go online and accept or her spot will be turned over to another incoming freshman.

BACK TO SCENE:

Noah returns the letter to its envelope. Whistling again, he strolls to the...

KITCHEN

At the sink, Noah removes a lighter from a drawer, holds the letter over the sink, and lights it on fire. When the blaze grows close to Noah's fingers, he drops it into the sink, where it quickly burns up. He douses the small remaining piece with water.

O.S. The main door closes.

ZOEY (O.S.)  
Dad?

Noah heads back to the...

LIVING ROOM

ZOEY JACKSON (18) is visibly upset. She slings her backpack to a chair and rushes to hug Noah. Cries on his shoulder.

NOAH  
What's wrong, honey?

ZOEY  
It's Tommy. He had an accident.

A sinister calm fills Noah's face as he pats Zoey's back.

NOAH

There, there. It's going to be all right.

ZOEY

He was going with me in the Fall. I loved him.

NOAH

I know you did, but accidents happen.

Zoey pulls back and removes a tissue from her pocket. Uses it to dry her wet face.

ZOEY

I don't understand why he was in the middle of the woods alone late at night. They think he couldn't see well and fell over the edge of a ravine.

NOAH

Hard to say. Teen boys do some crazy things. I know I did.

Noah leads Zoey to the couch.

NOAH

Come here.

They sit down. Noah keeps an arm around Zoey.

NOAH

I know how you feel right now, but you have so much to look forward to. College will be a whole new world for you.

Zoey sees the letters on the coffee table and looks through them. Drops them back on the table.

ZOEY

It doesn't look like there's going to be college in my future.

NOAH

It's hard to say what the schools are looking for these days. You can always stay home and go to community college.

ZOEY

All of my friends are going to REAL schools.

Zoey jumps up and ascends the steps. Noah watches her with a smirk.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL STADIUM - NIGHT

Many cars in the lot. SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS arrive in caps and gowns with FAMILY MEMBERS for a graduation. They enter the stadium.

Noah parks his car and gets out. From the passenger side, Zoey exits in her cap and gown, and studies the stadium with a glimmer of sadness.

NOAH

You wish your mom was here.

ZOEY

Yeah. She didn't even call.

NOAH

She's caught up in her own life. That's the main reason why we couldn't stay together.

Zoey still looks sad.

NOAH

Hey, I'll always be here for you.

Zoey grins. They walk to the stadium.

INT. STADIUM - NIGHT - LATER

The stands are half-full of family and friends of graduating seniors, mainly in the lower sections with some in the mid-section.

STANDS MID-SECTION

Noah is in the middle of a row in the mid-tier with a bad view of the field. He tries to look over those in his way.

ON THE FIELD

The graduation takes place. Rows and rows of chairs for graduating seniors, many occupied by seniors holding diplomas. The rest wait in line alphabetically.