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TOMORROW

 **SADDLEBACK**
EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHING

CHAPTER ONE

Lydell Nelson had been going to Harriet Tubman High School for three years. He was a senior now, but hardly anyone in the class knew him. He was slightly overweight, wore glasses, and always chose to eat alone. During lunch he was always writing in a journal. Nobody ever bothered to ask him what he was writing, and he never volunteered any information. Many students attended Tubman High. Many strong friendships had been forged when the kids were freshmen or even before then, at Marian Anderson Middle School. Little groups of students always ate lunch and hung out together. Lydell didn't belong to any of

these groups. He seemed to be a lonely person. But, when people tried to be friends, he turned them away.

Some people thought he was crazy. Some even thought he was dangerous.

Sami Archer, a senior, was also a little overweight. She was always on the lookout for the lonely outsider. She had noticed Lydell way back in tenth grade when he first appeared at Tubman. Sami had a radiant smile and a bubbly personality. If anybody could bring someone into her circle of friends, Sami could. But Lydell politely turned aside all her efforts and went his way. Sami didn't know why.

"He's weird," Sami confided in her closest friend, Alonee Lennox. Alonee was very lovely and popular. "He all the time writing away in that journal. I wonder what he's writing there. It's almost like he's a time traveler or something. Like he's taking notes about us."

"Maybe he's writing a novel," Alonee suggested. "The great American novel."

One of the senior English teachers was Langston Myers. He was actually a writer with poems published in obscure literary journals like *Mississippi Mud Ink*. He was paid for his work in copies of the journals. Some of the more unkind students, like Marko Lane, enjoyed making fun of him. Marko found Mr. Myers's poems in *Bayou Bard* on the Internet. He read them aloud to amuse his friends. Jasmine Benson, Marko's girlfriend, howled in laughter. Then word got around that Myers had written a novel and that he was having trouble getting it published. Marko found more humor in that.

But nobody was sure what Lydell Nelson was up to.

"He's probably terribly lonely," Sereeta Prince told her boyfriend, Jaris Spain. "I feel sorry for him. He sort of hides in that journal."

Sereeta and her friends always went to lunch together. They ate in a special spot at Tubman under some eucalyptus trees.

Alonee Lennox had originally gathered all of them together, and they were called Alonee's "posse." The group included Kevin Walker and his girlfriend, Carissa Polson. Derrick Shaw, Destini Fletcher, and Alonee's boyfriend, Oliver Randall, were also in the group. Sami Archer was often the center of things.

When they were at their lunch spot, Jaris made an announcement. "Pop did something he's never done before. He's been cooking a lot lately, but he never packed lunches for me and Chelsea. My little sister, chili pepper, she was watching Pop make our lunches. She said it's Swiss cheese, corned beef, creamy coleslaw on rye bread. I'm tellin' you guys, I'm ready for lunch!"

"Trade you a dried-up chicken breast on white bread," Alonee giggled.

"No way," Jaris laughed. He'd been thinking about Pop's sandwich all morning.

Munching on his sandwich, Jaris looked over at Lydell. He was sitting by

himself. "I've smiled at Lydell," Jaris remarked, "and said 'hi.' But he sorta ignores me. I even asked him to join us for lunch a couple times. But he didn't want to."

"I've asked him to come with us to lunch too," Sereeta said. "I smiled at him and he didn't even smile back."

"Anybody who wouldn't smile back at you, girl, has got to be one sick puppy," Sami Archer laughed.

"You can't force people to be friendly," Kevin Walker asserted. "I remember when I first came here from Texas. Alonee, you were chattering away and trying to make me feel at home. But I wasn't ready for it. But eventually you guys won me over."

Kevin finished his lunch and stretched out on the grass, looking at the clouds building in the sky. The weatherman promised rain, and Kevin was hoping for it. Back in Texas the clouds would gather quickly, and drenching rain would fall. It made everything green, and the creeks ran fast. Kevin was kind of a loner himself. He knew

where Lydell was coming from. Kevin carried a dark secret when he came to Tubman as a junior. His father had murdered a man, and he died in prison. That cast a shadow over Kevin's life. He thought maybe Lydell had dark secrets too.

“Maybe he just doesn't need anybody,” Sami mused thoughtfully. “I guess there's people like that. I don't understand 'em, but they out there. Makes you wonder, though. He okay, or he got bad feelings swirling in his soul? Maybe we think he's just happy bein' a loner, so we give him his space. But maybe he's thinkin' we all hate him and he's fixin' to explode.”

From their comfortable place under the eucalyptus trees, they could see Lydell sitting on one of the stone benches on campus. He always brought his lunch in a brown bag. It was always a sandwich and cottage cheese. He'd quickly finish his lunch and then start writing again in his journal.

Oliver Randall also joined Alonee's posse at Tubman after he moved from Los

Angeles. His father taught astronomy at the community college, and his mother sang opera. Oliver was bursting with personality and good looks. He wanted as many friends as he could get. Oliver asked, "Has anybody ever just walked up to Lydell and asked him what he was writing in his journal? Maybe he'd open up."

"Don't look at me," Jaris Spain protested. He was a warm, friendly guy, but he wasn't pushy. "To tell the truth, he guy sort of freaks me out. I've said stuff to him. Like there's a test coming up and is he ready, 'cause I'm not. And he didn't even answer me. At first I thought maybe he didn't speak English. I thought he was from some country in Africa where they spoke French or something. But then I heard him answer in class. He speaks regular English, no accent."

"I'm really curious," Oliver asserted with a grin. "I think I'll just do what my dad always says. I'll grab the bull by the horns. I'll walk up there and ask him what he's writing in his journal."

Trevor Jenkins was another member of Alonee's posse and Jaris's best friend. Trevor shook his head. "I wouldn't bother that dude, Oliver. I'm with Jaris. He freaks me."

The others knew Lydell from years back, even though they were not friends with him. But being new himself at Tubman, Oliver hadn't seen Lydell for very long. Oliver walked up the little path leading from the stand of eucalyptus trees. He slowly approached Lydell Nelson. The boy had finished his lunch and was writing in his journal. He had a spiral notebook and a ballpoint pen.

"Hi," Oliver greeted. "I'm Oliver Randall. I came to Tubman in my junior year."

Lydell ignored Oliver and continued writing in his spiral notebook.

"Uh, you're Lydell Nelson, right?" Oliver asked.

"Yes," Lydell replied. "What is it that you want?"

"Uh, nothing," Oliver said. "I just see you writing in your journal all the time. I

was curious. I wondered if you were writing a novel or something. That's interesting to me 'cause I try to write short stories sometimes."

Lydell looked at Oliver for another moment. Then he returned to his writing. He didn't say anything else. Oliver walked back down to the eucalyptus trees, where his friends were waiting. They had seen what happened. Both Jaris and Trevor had half smiles on their faces that said, "I told you so, dude."

Oliver shook his head. "He's got the coldest look in his eyes. I've never seen such a cold look," he commented.

Jaris nodded and agreed. "That's why he freaks me out. I can make friends with most people but . . ."

Kevin was still lying on the grass. He was still watching the clouds form into odd shapes. His mother, who died last year, used to go for walks with Kevin. She'd point out the shapes of animals and people in the clouds. It was fun walking with her in