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Unrequited Love

by Gill Kane

You were an embarrassment to me. From the first day of school you were always there following me around, wanting to sit with me, walk with me, play with me. The other boys bullied you remorselessly, called you a sissy and said with your blonde curly hair and big blue eyes you looked like a girl. I was never unkind but I avoided you and shrugged you off. Sometimes the other children would encircle you chanting “David loves Sally”. You were unfazed but I was mortified. Everybody knew. The children knew, the teachers knew, the whole school knew that David loved Sally and was going to marry her when he grew up.

In primary 7 when I took my class photo home, my aunt, unaware of my private shame, pointed to you. “Who’s that handsome boy?” “He looks like a young Paul Newman”. My mother agreed whilst I pretended to be sick.

At secondary school I didn’t see as much of you. We were in different classes and you had, finally, made some friends. But on the bus home you would sit near me, ask me to go to the cinema or the tennis club and, red and embarrassed, I would shake my head no. For I only had eyes for the boys who wore jeans and black leather jackets and stood on street corners smoking. I had no time for nice boys who looked like a young Paul Newman. We were around 15 or 16 when you disappeared from school. You never said goodbye, you just never came back after the easter break and I heard your family had moved to London.

I married one of the boys in black leather jackets but that didn’t work out too well and it was as a young single mum I first saw you on television. It was one of those luscious, elaborate BBC Sunday night dramas and you were an instant success. You won young actor of the year. They said you would go far. They compared you to a young Paul Newman. After that I followed your career. Now I watched your life from the sidelines as you had once watched mine. You married the actress who looks like me. The one that people always say “Has anyone ever told you that you look like...?” And I shrug modestly and say “If only...”

You were knighted last year. One of the greats of British film and theatre. Your blond hair is grey now but your blue eyes still twinkle and they say you are more handsome than ever. The boy who had no friends is now universally adored. I never remarried and my children are grown. They laugh at me as I watch your films over and over. "No mum, not this again!"

But they don't understand, because I have never told them that there was a time when everybody knew that David loved Sally.