22

Sam

I had known Samantha Wendt since third grade, but it wasn’t until high school that we really became friends. She and I started bonding when we joined the tightly-knit social circle of the school tennis team. The team had a way of drawing peers together, regardless of how little we might have in common or how sociable we were. After whacking a few balls around the courts and attending team parties together, we gradually grew closer, as a part of the friendship circle that the team was rapidly forging.

As time went on, Sam and I spent more and more time together. We conversed through text-messaging. We scheduled practice matches to improve our skills. We worked together in our class geography. We hung out after parties. We saw more and more of each other, as the years progressed.

The more time I spent around her, the more I began to notice her. I could easily say that she was one of the prettiest girls I knew. During every geography class, I found myself paying more attention to the ponytail in the back of her strawberry-blonde head than to Mrs. Connor’s discussion. At every party or gathering we attended, I had to struggle to keep myself from staring. Luckily for me, our interests tended to align, and she was easy to find both inside and outside of class.

As time passed, Sam and I remained friends. I played tennis with her whenever she asked and scheduled a few matches between us myself. Of course, I enjoyed tennis, as I always have, but what I really looked forward to was spending time with Sam.

She was always easy to talk to, when we were alone. I always loved seeing her pretty smile and so my goal was always to make her laugh. Some of my attempts at humor didn't quite work, but, fortunately, these seemed to make her laugh even more.

I often contemplated asking her out, but never accumulated the nerve to make the move. I told myself that I wasn’t ready for any romantic attachment or that I valued her friendship too much to risk it. But the plain and simple truth was that I was, as my brother often put it, a “wuss.”

Our friendship continued as it always had, until, one day, during our junior year, I came to tennis practice with big news: this would be my last year in Texas; I would be moving to California that summer. This was a momentous occasion both for all my friends and for myself.

Surprisingly, this revelation had unforeseen effects on my relationship with Sam. It seemed that our imminent separation uncovered a secret affection that had never been revealed before. Suddenly, Sam and I began spending more and more time together. We had always been friends, but now she seemed to crave my company more and more everyday. It was as if knowing that we were about to part ways had caused her to see me differently.

One day, shortly before my move, I received a text from her asking me if I would like to accompany her to see a movie. At first, I thought she wanted to arrange a customary outing with a group of our friends, but she later clarified that she wanted it to be just the two of us. Filled with surprise and excitement, I pondered exactly what this might imply. Was she looking for a simple night out between two friends, or a date? I didn’t know how to ask, so I attempted to prepare for both.

That night, I dressed casually, but made sure that I looked my as fetching as I could manage, given my informal attire. I remember watching her walk up her driveway and get into the passenger side of my car. From the looks of her, she seemed to be following my strategy. I couldn’t quite discern whether she was dressed for a friendly outing or for an official date.

We both enjoyed that night. The film *Savages* proved to be very entertaining and I succeeded in making her laugh and winning more of her coveted smiles. The night ended as it had begun: very welcome but with a vague intent. I remember dropping her off at her house and walking her to the door. She told me that she had had a great time and bid me farewell. That was that.

In a few weeks, my family and I had relocated to San Diego. I missed all my friends from Texas and kept in touch with them for years to come. However, of all those I had left behind, I found myself missing Sam the most.

I curse my cowardice for not allowing our friendship to grow into something more, and I have since resolved to do my best never to let myself make the same mistake again. Although I may never know if she returned the same feelings I had for her, I regret lacking the drive to test them. Now, all I know is that I will always remember having her as a friend. Although I may never be sure of what we could’ve been, having been friends is a blessing indeed.