

Snippet: Nowhere Man

MJones

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Dialog

Action

Appearance

Thought

“Man, I missed football. Thanks for sitting through that game. I know it sucks if you don’t care about football.”

“Wasn’t that bad. It was nice being out.”

Her boots clicked on the pavement as she walked. She kept her pace to a leisurely stroll. JC kept pace with her. If she wasn’t in a hurry, neither was he. “Hey, let me ask you something.”

“Sure.”

“You ever uhm... you ever see people you used to know?”

“Hmmm,” she said, **pondering**. Then, “Not really. Anyone I knew back then left when they graduated. No one comes back here once they get out.”

“Do you have brothers and sisters? Ever see them?”

“I’m the baby. I have an older brother and older sister. They’re uh... your age.” **She elbowed him a few times and giggled.** “They don’t live here. Like I said, people get out of here and don’t come back.”

JC smiled down at her. “Tell me your brother and sister have weird names, too. Please tell me that.”

Phoe refused to answer for a few seconds, but after prodding and needling from JC, she gave in. “Okay.

My sister’s name is Sunshine.” **JC laughed loudly.** “Right? But she’s always gone by Amy because she

thinks my parents are nutters for naming her that. She won’t change it, but she won’t answer to it. Not

in public anyway. My brother’s name is Blaze. He loves his name.”

"I'd love that name. I think I'm gonna go by uh... Joaquin."

"That's too cool of a name. You should have to suffer like me and Sunshine."

"You mean Amy?"

"No, I mean Sunshine. That's what I call her because I'm a bitch like that. If I have to go by Phoenix, she has to go by Sunshine. Sometimes she answers to it." Phee laughed a deliciously evil chuckle. JC instantly loved the sound.

"What about your parents. Do you see them?"

The glee from their conversation faded like water draining from a sink. The span of silence grew from seconds to a full minute and longer before she sighed, loud and heavy.

"I saw my mom awhile ago. She showed up at the hotel. Someone must have said they saw me there. She was all lovey-dovey, wanting to talk and catch up. She wanted me to come home."

"You didn't want to go?" She shook her head, quickly. "No. My parents like to put stipulations on things. It'll never be that I can come home and live the life I want to live. But I could go home and live the life they want me to live."

"Which is?"

"Hah," she bit out. "Quit associating with dirty, homeless people. We're above that, you know. Quit my job, probably. They'd want me to get some meaningless job where I look pretty for hours on end but I'm bored shitless. They'd want me to go to school and dress differently and wear expensive, trendy clothes. After living outside, in the woods, on the river or squatting in an abandoned warehouse with no running water and nothing but a tarp to protect us from the wind?"

She shook her head, glancing up at him. "I'm not sure I can ever waste money again. Their lifestyle and how they don't help people with any of it just makes me sick."

JC knew that feeling well. He had a little bit of money in his pocket and that scared him, because soon it would be gone and he had no guarantees that he could replace it soon. The first habit he'd learned, out on the street, was to stretch a dollar as far as it could go.

"My mom said they had a car for me. Just sitting at home. I asked her if I could use it and she said I'd

have to come home first.” She spat out the word with so much venom, it scared him. “Bitch.”

“A car would be nice for you. No more Number 34.”

“I know. And it would help me out so much. I could work more, I could help out Cass. I could give rides to people.” Her breath was a visible puff of air as she sighed again. “Let’s stop talking about my mom, otherwise I’ll need a cigarette and one of those bottles of vodka. What about you? You see people you know? You have brothers and sisters right?”

He nodded. “One of each. I haven’t seen either in a long time. They’re kind of not talking to me because of what happened with my parents. And I haven’t seen my parents in a long time. Almost a year.”

“Any reason?”

“They’re getting back on their feet, little by little. Things are going okay for them. They don’t need me messing things up again.”

Phee slowed and then stopped. “Wait. You really think they think that?”

JC didn’t stop. His hands were shoved deep into his pockets and balled into fists. His feet kept going forward and his mouth kept moving. Phee hurried to catch up again.

“Them? Nah. I’m their kid. They still love me. But I really think that. I try to call every so often to let them know I’m okay. It kills me to talk to my mom. She always cries, and my dad is always in the background, telling her to tell me things like who’s hiring and who has cheap housing and stuff. She asks me to come home all the time.”

“And you don’t want to go?”

“They only have one bedroom. I don’t want to live in their couch. Not because it’s uncomfortable. It’s just, I feel like if I went, I wouldn’t leave.” Sort of like how he hoped he wouldn’t have to leave Phee’s any time soon. At least until it wasn’t so cold at night.

They’d reached the bus stop. He climbed up onto the bench, his feet on the seat, and sat on the backrest. Phee stood, pacing the small area between the bus stop sign and the bench.

“You okay?” JC asked.

She paused. "Yeah. Why?"

"You seem a little worked up. Should I have not asked about your mom?"

"It's fine," she said. "Just brings up old memories and feelings and fights we had. I feel like I've changed a lot and they haven't. I could go home if they'd give, just a little..." She leaned against the pole with the bus route sign on it.

"They think they're right and that they know what's best. And if you'd just give a little..."

"I know you don't really know me, but I'm not the type to grovel."

"I guess I need to get to know you, then."

She pushed off of the pole with her shoulder and sauntered over to the bench, stopping directly in front of him. They were eye to eye, face to face, the moonlight casting an eerie glow.

If he was a betting man, he'd have placed his entire day's wages on the chance that she'd stand in front of him and then step close and closer still and lean into him until her lips grazed his. And that once she touched him, he'd not be able to control himself, or at least his lips and his tongue. His head would tilt to the side and his mouth would open and she would move in again and this time the kiss would be deep and strong.

If he were betting man, he'd be rich.