

ANOTHER SUNRISE

by
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CHARACTERS:

MAN – 40, A man with a purpose. He is calm and, through his serene demeanor, is able to bring peace to those around him.

JESSIE – 40, An unemployed man at the end of his rope.

SETTING:

Today. A bus stop bench facing East.

A bus stop bench, early morning. That time just before dawn. Jessie sits alone “reading” the paper. Every few seconds he looks about, then returns to his paper. After a few moments, a Man sits next to him. Jessie stiffens, folds his paper, and sets it aside.

MAN

(Takes out an apple, starts to cut and eat.)

Good morning.

JESSIE

Uh... hi.

MAN

Don't let me interrupt you.

JESSIE

I was just ... it doesn't matter. Sorry.

MAN

No need to apologize.

(They sit for a moment in silence.)

JESSIE

(Referring to paper.)

Classifieds. Like it matters, huh?

MAN

Tough world out there.

JESSIE

Getting tougher.

MAN

Used to be a man could easily get a job in his field, especially with a college degree. *(beat)* College degree?

JESSIE

Huh? Me? Sure. Doesn't seem to help anymore.

MAN

No, it does not.

JESSIE

Been lookin' a long time?

MAN

If something comes along, then fine. If not?

(Shrugs.)

JESSIE

It's been more than a year for me. My degrees and my experience and I can't even get an interview.

MAN

All too common story these days.

JESSIE

Yeah. The longer it goes, the worse it gets.

MAN

It's important to keep a positive attitude.

(Jessie looks at him with a mix of confusion and incredulity.)

That's what all the books say, at least.

JESSIE

Yeah.

MAN

(A moment of uncomfortable silence, then:)

Would you like to hear a joke?

JESSIE

Joke?

MAN

You look like you need a little laugh.

JESSIE

(Checks his watch. Looks at the horizon.)

All right. Tell me a joke.

MAN

This man walks into a bar with a dog. He walks up to the bartender and says, "I have the world's only talking dog. Give me a drink, I'll ask him a question." The bartender, skeptical yet intrigued, gives him a drink. The man turns to the dog and says, "What does it feel like when you sit on sandpaper?" The dog says, "Ruff! Ruff!" The bartender is a bit miffed, as would be expected: "That dog doesn't talk, all dogs talk like that. Get the hell outta here." The man replies, "Tell ya what. Give me another drink, I'll ask him a harder question." The bartender looks at him sideways and says, "No. Get the hell outta here." "Come on. One more." The bartender thinks about it a minute, then pours him another. The man turns to the dog again and says, "What's over your head when you're in the house?" The dog replies, "Roof! Roof!" Now the bartender is gettin' a bit pissed, "Get the hell outta here! Hey, Joe! Get this jerk outta here!" "Wait! I tell ya what! One more drink and I'll ask him a question that's so hard you probably couldn't answer it yourself." The bartender thinks for a minute, then says, "Fine. But this is it.

(MORE)

MAN (cont'd)

Another one like them other two and you're out on your ass!" The man turns to the dog and asks, "Who was the greatest player in baseball?" The dog thinks for a moment, then says, "Ruth! Ruth!" That's the limit, there, and the bartender climbs over the bar and smacks the guy around before booting him and the dog out onto the sidewalk. They are sitting there, man and his best friend looking at each other, when the dog says, "Would you believe DiMaggio?"

(Both men laugh.)

One of my favorites from my dad.

JESSIE

"Would you believe DiMaggio!"

(He laughs a few more moments.)

I'll have to remember that one for...

(He trails off.)

Kids today wouldn't get that joke. You know, the kids getting our jobs. They have no sense of history.

MAN

Yes.

JESSIE

My last boss was barely outta college. Has no clue how to do business! No respect for history. *(beat)* I know this all sounds very Willy Loman but...

(He trails off.)

You know what he did? Huh? He fired a bunch of the older guys... Sorry, "downsized" due to the economy. He waited a few months then, expanded again. Hired all of his friends from college.

MAN

You have to let it go.

JESSIE

What?! Let it go?! You don't think that's wrong?!

MAN

Of course it is. Is yelling at me changing anything? Is he going to walk up here now and give you your job back?

JESSIE

(He stands, starts pacing, stewing.)

He damn well should! That ever happen to you? Huh? Ever find yourself knifed in the back and laid out on a slab?!

MAN

Sure. Had to move on. It was taking over my life, hating the situation. I had to find some way to leave it behind.

JESSIE
 Leave it behind... Yeah. OK. Problem is, we're the ones being left behind!
(Still pacing, steamed.)

MAN
(pause)
 Would you like to hear another joke?

JESSIE
 No!

MAN
 All right.

JESSIE
(Under his breath.)
 You got over it. I bet you got over it.
(To Man.)
 Alright. I'll bite. Tell me, big man, how did you get over it? Huh? How do you get over losing everything? Huh?!

MAN
 Need to find a niche. Fill a need.

JESSIE
(Mockingly.)
 Niche.

MAN
 Are you receptive?

JESSIE
 Huh?

MAN
 Are you receptive?

JESSIE
 To what?

MAN
 Everything the world has to offer?

JESSIE
 Destitution? Poverty?

MAN
(Moving to get up.)
 I can see I was mistaken. Good luck.

JESSIE
No. Wait. Look... sorry... I just...

MAN
(Sitting back down.)
I understand. *(beat)* Well, are you?

JESSIE
What?

MAN
Open to / what the world...

JESSIE
Oh. Yeah. I like to think so.

MAN
You either are or you are not. I am. You know what I have found by just listening and watching the world around me?

JESSIE
That it's a pretty shitty place?

MAN
It can be.

JESSIE
(Beat as Jessie Stares at him.)
Alright, enlighten me.

MAN
We live in a world in pain. Individually and collectively. The important thing is—at least, the most important thing to remember—is that all I can do is try to help on an individual level. It's all anyone can do. Try to bite off too much and you'll choke. *(beat)* You're choking, aren't you?

JESSIE
(He, wearily, returns to the bench and plops down.)
God, yes!

MAN
And it feels like the world doesn't care enough to give you the Heimlich.

JESSIE
It just shoves it down further.

MAN

Individual. It's all you can have *any* kind of control over. *(beat)* For what it's worth, that's what I have learned. When I figured that out, though, it changed my life. See, I watched the world walk by me while I floundered, tried to find a new career or a job back in the old one, and I saw the scariest thing I could ever hope to not see. We are in a world infected by a profound contagion that fills the soul, eats it, and leaves us meandering, throbbing shells. That's when I realized my calling. That's when I discovered my next move. My next career.

JESSIE

Yeah?

MAN

I decided that since I see this... since I can recognize it in others... it is my responsibility to help however I can. *(beat)* Do you know what the greatest feeling in life is? That moment when the pain releases and you feel nothing adverse. Think about when you get a headache, one that knocks you down for the count. Now think of the moment when you realize the pain is gone. Would you trade that feeling of relief... of freedom... for anything?

(Jessie smiles slightly.)

That's what I do. I relieve the pain. Help those who ask to find peace.

JESSIE

So...

MAN

Yes.

JESSIE

Can I ask you something?

MAN

Certainly.

JESSIE

(Becoming solemn as he investigates the man's face.)

Am I doing the right thing?

MAN

(A little exasperated.)

Only you can answer that.

(They sit in silence.)

Is everything in order?

JESSIE

What? Like insurance?

MAN

Whatever you have in place for your progeny.

JESSIE

Yes. *(beat)* That's the real kick in the balls, there. You know, when they let me go, they gave me only six months' severance pay but they paid my life insurance up for a year. How fucked up is that?

MAN

Very.

JESSIE

That's why I... You know...

MAN

Yes.

(They fall into silence staring out. After a few moments:)

How are you feeling?

JESSIE

Getting better.

MAN

Ready?

JESSIE

Give me a few more minutes. 'Til the sunrise.

MAN

Certainly.

JESSIE

(beat)

What did you do before... well, this?

MAN

That doesn't matter.

JESSIE

Please.

MAN

(beat)

Journalist. Features and reviews. That kind of stuff. You?

JESSIE

Supervisor. Manufacturing.

MAN
Was it a good career?

JESSIE
Yeah.

MAN
Friends?

JESSIE
Yeah. Way too many of us in the same boat, though. No one was in a position to help anyone else, hence...

(Indicating current situation.)

It's amazing how quickly you lose touch when you don't see each other every day at work. Not to mention the local friends when you have to move away.

(beat)

Sun's about come up.

MAN
It is. *(beat)* How are you feeling?

JESSIE
Why do you keep asking?

MAN
Did you listen?

JESSIE
Yeah, I did.

MAN
Why are you so resistant to feeling the slightest peace?

JESSIE
I'm not. I didn't think I was, at least.

MAN
It is increasingly difficult, I'm sure.

JESSIE
Yeah, it is. *(beat)* So, how does this work?

MAN
Close your eyes.

JESSIE
But, the sunrise.

MAN

No worries. You'll see it.

(Jessie closes his eyes.)

Breathe. Slowly, evenly. The sun is rising and you will greet a brand new day. A new hope awaits.

(The Man rises and moves behind Jessie. During the next speech he takes a piece of fabric from his pocket and slips it around Jessie's neck. Jessie stiffens and the man calms him as he tightens it slightly. The Man reaches into Jessie's inside jacket pocket and pulls out his wallet.)

Feel your pain fading away. Allow your worries to float up and out. No more trouble. No more world grinding away at your sanity. Just the brightest, happiest memories of your life. Your favorite picture of your children. Your wedding day. Your kids' births. The love of those around you.

(Jessie smiles slightly as the man unfurls the fabric to reveal a handwritten "Have a Nice Day" and its ubiquitous smiley face.)

How do you feel, Jessie?

JESSIE

Good.

MAN

(Starting to back away into the shadows.)

Peaceful?

JESSIE

Yes.

(The man disappears as the sunrise overtakes Jessie who remains sitting, smiling.)

End of play.