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by Mark Lyons

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FADE IN:

EXT. LUCIUS AVENUE - DAY

Half-skeletal trees line the cracked sidewalks. What leaves are left are brown and burnt orange.

Only half the houses are raked. The others are empty and vacant and graffitied. Some of them, the windows are broken and doors kicked in.

JONATHAN RILEY, mid-30's, rolls a trash can down his driveway.

Three houses down, he doesn't see MISS LYDIA, old and puckered face, drag a small can down hers.

Jonathan leaves his at the curb and notices movement from behind the house across the street from Miss Lydia's.

It's abandoned and vandalized, and the Southside Niggaz have left their signature in spray paint.

TEDDY RILEY, early 30's; head down, dishevelled, struggling to keep straight; walks from around the back of the house.

Teddy reaches the sidewalk and turns. Ignores everybody. He walks with a medium limp. Buries his hands in his ratty trench coat.

Jonathan watches him, then sees Miss Lydia, her jaw agape, staring at the strange bum walking down the street.

JONATHAN
(whisper)
Oh, shit.

He hurries down the sidewalk toward Miss Lydia, who remains frozen.

JONATHAN
You got anymore, Miss Lydia?

MISS LYDIA
A few. Did you see that man come out of the McClendons' old place?

JONATHAN

I wasn't paying much attention.

He walks back up the driveway with her. She cranes her neck to watch Teddy walk off around the corner.

Three more cans along the side of her house. Jonathan grabs two. Miss Lydia the last one.

MISS LYDIA

People just coming in here and thinking they can move up into a place without paying for it.

JONATHAN

I'm sure he just needs a roof over his head until a bed opens up at the mission.

MISS LYDIA

I can't wait 'til God gets His chance to tell them how wrong they are.

JONATHAN

I thought He was supposed to forgive us our trespassers?

MISS LYDIA

Well the police don't. And neither do I.

They set the cans at the curb and she sweetens. Pats him on a hand.

MISS LYDIA

Thank you, Jonny, so much for helping me. I wish God put more people like you down here with us.

Jonathan smiles for all but a second.

JONATHAN

Thank you.

She heads back in her house. Checks one last time down the street for the mysterious man.

Jonathan smiles again. He digs the truck keys out of his plaster-splattered work jeans.

EXT. AUBURNDALE AVENUE - DAY

Like Lucius, half the houses in this neighborhood are vacant.

Teddy walks away from the corner convenient store, a twelve-pack of cheap beer in one hand and the necks of two forties sticking out a plastic bag in the other.

An old pick up pulls beside him in the street and Jonathan steps halfway out. Keeps the truck running.

JONATHAN
Excuse me.

Teddy keeps walking.

JONATHAN
Excuse me!

Teddy turns around and sees Jonathan at the driver's side of the truck. His eyes grow fearful, but only for a moment.

JONATHAN
I see you've been staying at the house on Lucius. One fifty-seven.

The fear is gone and Teddy just stares back.

JONATHAN
I don't think it's a good idea to stay there tonight.

TEDDY
The house is abandoned. There's no notice on the door. It's not illegal until the cops come themselves and tell me to move along.

JONATHAN

They're probably going to come tonight, if it's slow enough and a bored cop wants something to do.

Teddy just gives an icy stare.

JONATHAN

It's not me who's going to call. When you left, Miss Lydia, from across the street where you're staying, saw you.

The plastic bag holding the forties begins to rip and Teddy cradles the bottles with an awkward arm.

JONATHAN

She's called on a couple squatters already. One lady even had three kids and she didn't hesitate.

TEDDY

I'll make sure I don't stay there too long.

JONATHAN

What I'm trying to say is I know what it's like to be in a bad position. Hell, I'm still kind of in one.

Teddy still stares at him.

JONATHAN

But if you need a place to stay... I have running water at least. I'm sure that's better than dealing with the police all night. Especially if you have a history.

TEDDY

I don't have a history with them.

JONATHAN

It's up to you. The offer's there.

Teddy looks at the long sidewalk ahead of him, then hobbles over to the passenger door.

Jonathan gets back in the truck, leans over, and pushes the door open.

Teddy plops his beer on the floor and struggles to get in.

TEDDY
Thank you.

JONATHAN
Anything for a vet.

Teddy's eyes fill with fear again for a quick moment.

TEDDY
You know me?

JONATHAN
No.

Jonathan nods towards Teddy's boots.

JONATHAN
Military issue. You'll never see those at St. Vincent de Paul or the mission mall. Reverend Sherman pilfers out the good stuff before it even makes it to the public.

He holds out a hand.

JONATHAN
I'm Jonathan.

Reluctant for a moment, Teddy takes it.

TEDDY
Teddy.

Teddy looks for a reaction from Jonathan. There is none.

JONATHAN
Were you in Afghanistan or Iraq?

TEDDY
Iraq.

Jonathan motions to Teddy's bum leg.

 JONATHAN
Shot? If you don't mind me asking.

 TEDDY
Just shrapnel. Nothing to be
proud of.

 JONATHAN
Sure it is.

Teddy looks at Jonathan and, for the first time, smiles.

EXT. LUCIUS - DAY

The pick-up stops to let Teddy out, then pulls into Jonathan's driveway.

Teddy gimps to the vacant house he's been staying and around to the back door.

INT. BASEMENT

Moldy and barren, except for five or six smushed cardboard containers and sixty or seventy-two beer cans, Teddy rolls a pillow for easy carrying.

He searches the folds in his blanket on the floor. He finds two push daggers and shoves them carefully in the pockets of his trenchcoat.

He rolls the blanket around the pillow and stands. Looks to the wall in a far corner.

Dozens of pictures of Jonathan. All of them scotch-taped.

Jonathan in his truck. Walking in his house. Leaving his house. All of them dated and timed.

A mugshot of a younger Jonathan, also.

Teddy turns, shoves his rolled up pillow and blanket under an arm, and buries his hands deep in the pockets of his trench coat.

INT. JONATHAN'S KITCHEN - DAY

Jonathan washes his hands at the sink.

Teddy sets the rolled up pillow and blanket on the table, next to his twelve pack and two forties. He gestures to the beer.

TEDDY
You want one?

JONATHAN
No, thanks. I don't drink. But
feel free yourself. There's plenty
of room in the fridge if you want
to stick 'em in there.

Teddy sticks the twelve pack and one of the forties in the fridge. The other, he sticks in the freezer.

He closes the door and looks at everything stuck to the fridge with magnets. Newspaper coupons, flyers for food drives.

TEDDY
You got a family?

JONATHAN
No. I've dodged some bullets.
Then gotten my heart broken once
or twice. Nothing major, though.
Just shrapnel.

Teddy gives a little 'ha'.

TEDDY
I saw you got two nice-sized
turkeys in the freezer, so I wasn't
sure if you were planning a big
dinner for the holiday.

JONATHAN

No. Actually, I have ten more in the ice box down in the basement. Those are the two that wouldn't fit. I'm going to run 'em all down to the mission on Monday. They should thaw by Thursday.

TEDDY

Didn't you have a little kid in your truck a couple days ago?

JONATHAN

I didn't know you were watching.

Teddy looks at him, alarmed, then shrugs.

TEDDY

I was walking by a window and glanced out.

Jonathan smiles.

JONATHAN

That's Lucas. It's kind of a Big Brother thing I volunteer for at the Boys and Girls Club. I pick him up a couple days out of the week and we go bowling or see a movie. I talk to him, see how school is, make sure there's nothing wrong going on at home.

TEDDY

You do a lot of charity work?

JONATHAN

What I can, when I can. Remember when I told you I'm kind of in a similar situation as you?

Teddy nods.

JONATHAN

I don't own it here. I'm squatting,
too.

Teddy laughs.

JONATHAN

I have a little bit of a gambling
problem and had a bad year a little
while back. I'm still recovering
from it.

Jonathan gestures to the house.

JONATHAN

I grew up here as a kid, but after
my dad died, I let the house go by
the way of the bank. I'm just glad
I got back here to it before the
Southside Niggaz gutted out all
the copper and toilets.

Teddy lets out a chuckle.

TEDDY

Well, you kicked your drinking
problem. Think you can kick your
gambling one?

JONATHAN

I'll find out once I can get some
money saved up. How'd you know I
had a drinking problem?

TEDDY

Ain't there always a dependency when
someone turns down a drink?

Jonathan shrugs and nods.

JONATHAN

How about you? You from around here?

TEDDY

Niles. Born and bred. Did a couple years in the army, then came back here. When I did, they declared I had a problem with my...

Looks for the word.

JONATHAN

Anger?

TEDDY

Emotions. And anxiety. I've just recently been starting to get myself under control, though.

Jonathan nods.

JONATHAN

Welp, like I said, you're more than welcome to stay. I got a couch you can crash on, or I got a small bed up in the attic, if you'd rather sleep up there. It's furnished for the most part.

Teddy picks up his rolled pillow and blanket. Grabs the forty out of the freezer.

FADE TO:

INT. JONATHAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Footsteps startle Jonathan awake. He looks over to his closed bedroom door.

The bathroom light shines under the doorcrack.

The footsteps creak closer and closer and a shadow stands in front of the door. Pauses for an uncomfortable moment.

Finally, the shadow disappears into the bathroom and the light fades as the bathroom door closes.

Jonathan hears a strong stream of urine hit both the toilet water and bounce off the porcelain wall of the bowl.

The stream stops, the door opens, and the light reappears under the crack of the bedroom door.

The shadow stops again, then the bathroom light goes off and footsteps creak back down the hallway up the attic stairs.

Jonathan closes his eyes again.

FADE

SOUND: Four loud thuds on heavy wood. Jarring.

INT. JONATHAN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Jonathan gasps and his eyes shoot open. It's early, but the sun still pours in the window.

Four more loud thuds on the door downstairs.

Jonathan stands up, throws a shirt on and slips into a pair of shoes.

INT. KITCHEN

Jonathan walks through and looks at the sink.

Twelve empty cans and two empty forties sit, haphazard, on the kitchen counter. Jonathan shakes his head.

Four more thuds from the living room. These ones louder and meaning business.

Jonathan walks into the --

LIVING ROOM

-- and opens the door. A mustached COP looks at him.

COP
You Jonathan Riley?

JONATHAN

Yeah.

COP

You know a Theodoore Oliver?

Jonathan thinks for a moment.

JONATHAN

I think so. I let him stay here last night.

The cop looks at him, startled.

COP

He stayed here last night?
With you?

JONATHAN

I felt bad. I told him he could stay here until a bed opens up at the mission.

COP

Do you know how long he's been staying at the house over there?

Jonathan looks at the house. Three cop cars sit in front. OFFICERS stand around the front yard.

One of them has Teddy face down on the ground, cuffed behind his back.

JONATHAN

I first saw him about a week ago.

COP

Did you know him before this?

JONATHAN

No. Look, I don't think there's any reason he should be arrested. I'm sure he was just over there getting something he forgot yesterday.

COP
He knows you, Mr. Riley.

Jonathan stops.

JONATHAN
I'm sorry?

COP
He has your mugshot scotch-taped
in the basement over there.

Jonathan pauses.

JONATHAN
I haven't been arrested since high
school. He had my mugshot?

COP
I don't know how he knows you, but
he has pictures of you coming and
going from here. Hundreds of them.
What times you left. What times
you came back.

Jonathan takes a moment to digest this.

COP
We didn't find any guns in the
house, but when we showed up this
morning, he was packing all the
pictures. He had two United
Undercover push daggers on him.
Pretty nice set, too. Military
issue.

Jonathan looks at Teddy laying on the ground, keeping his face
turned away.

COP
You're sure the man laying in the
grass over there stayed in your house
last night?

JONATHAN

Yeah.

The cop gives a tiny laugh. Jonathan thinks.

An officer lifts Teddy off the grass and escorts him into a police cruiser.

JONATHAN

Katie Oliver... I think I know
who he is, now.

The cop says nothing, just waits for Jonathan to finish.

JONATHAN

It was a long time ago. I was on my
way home after a Sadies Hawkins dance.
I killed a girl in another car.

The cop looks down in respect. Jonathan motions to Teddy.

JONATHAN

I think that's her little brother.
I didn't recognize the last name at
first, but when you told me he had
my mugshot, I put it together.

The cop nods and shrugs.

COP

Well, for right now, we got him for
criminal trespassing, and I'll hit
him up for a menace by stalking.
Might be able to even bump it to
aggravated because of the weapons.

Jonathan nods.

COP

There'll be a detective assigned.
He'll probably get a hold of you
in the next couple days.

The cop turns and walks away. Jonathan watches him walk off the porch.

JONATHAN
Thank you.

Jonathan sees Teddy in the backseat of the cruiser. Calm.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Jonathan walks up from the first floor and stops. Notices how close his bedroom is to the bathroom door.

He walks up the next flight of stairs.

INT. ATTIC

Everything is clean and in order. Even the bed's made.

Jonathan walks over and picks up a piece of paper ripped out of a nearby notebook.

The paper is headed '**Jonathan**' in sloppy cursive.

TEDDY (V.O.)
I know you don't recognize me or my name. But I've been wanting an apology from you for a very long time.

Jonathan sits on the bed.

TEDDY (V.O.)
I'd be lying if I said I haven't thought about killing you. Watching you die like I watched my sister in the hospital.

Jonathan closes his eyes.

TEDDY (V.O.)
But I know it's not right, and it wouldn't make me feel better about anything. I thought a lot last night about what can make me feel better. And then I thought about you.

Jonathan stands, walks back down the stairs.

 TEDDY (V.O.)
Your work with the mission. Your
work with the Boys and Girls Club.
Letting a stranger stay with you
because he's going through hard
times.

INT. KITCHEN

Jonathan walks in and sits at the kitchen table. Reads the note.

 TEDDY (V.O.)
I think what it all comes down to,
is that an apology from you won't
make me feel better and won't help
me move on. I think to move on, I
have to forgive you. Honestly,
wholeheartedly, forgive you.

Jonathan puts the paper down and looks at all the empty beer cans and two empty forties on the counter.

 TEDDY (V.O.)
I'm sure you would've apologized if
you knew who I was. But you don't
have to. You already have with the
way you live your life.

Jonathan stands and walks to the sink. He sniffs the drain and recoils at the smell.

 TEDDY (V.O.)
And I know you don't need to hear
this, but I'm saying it more for
me than you. I forgive you, Jon.

Jonathan looks again at all the empties and smiles.

TEDDY (V.O.)
I can say it now and honestly mean
it.

CUT TO BLACK.

 TEDDY (V.O.)
I forgive you.

FADE IN:

FLASHBACK

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Teddy stands at the kitchen sink. He opens and empties the cans down the sink.

 TEDDY (V.O.)
I know now that I want to live the
way you have been. By giving
yourself.

Teddy stops and looks at the refrigerator again. Notices a ratty yellowed newspaper clipping halfway hidden under a coupon.

He pulls the clipping out.

An obituary picture of a young girl with blonde hair. **'Katie Oliver, 17'**.

He shakes his head and leaves the picture under another magnet in front of all the coupons and food drive flyers.

 TEDDY (V.O.)
I know now that there's a lot more
to life than just struggling to
get by yourself.

Teddy goes back to pour more cheap beer down the sink.

FADE