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by Mark Lyons

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FADE IN:

EXT. LUCIUS AVENUE - DAY

Skeletal trees line the sidewalks.

Only half the houses are raked. The others are vacant and graffitied; the windows broken and doors kicked in.

A typical rust belt neighborhood.

JONATHAN RILEY, late-30's, rolls a trashcan down his driveway.

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

Jonathan leaves his can at the curb and notices movement from 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 OLIVER, early-30's; dishevelled, struggling to keep straight; walks from around the back of the house.

Teddy ignores everybody and buries his hands deep into the ratty folds of his trench coat.

He walks with a limp down the sidewalk.

Jonathan sees Miss Lydia notice Teddy, her jaw agape and watching the strange bum walking down the street.

JONATHAN
(to himself)
Shit.

He rushes over to Miss Lydia, who's still frozen and staring at Teddy across the street.

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 disappear around the corner.

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 God was supposed to forgive us our trespasses?

MISS LYDIA

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

They bring the rest of her tiny cans to the curb and she sweetens. She pats him on the hand.

MISS LYDIA

Thank you, Jonny. I wish God would've put more people like you down here with us.

Jonathan smiles. A big smile.

She walks back inside her house.

She looks one more time in the mysterious man's direction, even though he's long gone.

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

EXT. AUBURNDALE AVENUE - DAY

Half the houses on this street are vacant also.

Teddy carries a twelve-pack of cheap beer in one hand and two forties sticking out a plastic bag in the other.

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

JONATHAN

Excuse me?

Teddy keeps walking.

JONATHAN

Excuse me!

Teddy turns and sees Jonathan standing by his 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.

Teddy just stares at him.

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, my neighbor from across the street where you're staying at saw you.

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

JONATHAN

She's called on a couple squatters already. One lady even had three kids and Miss Lydia didn't even hesitate calling the police when she found out.

TEDDY

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

JONATHAN

What I'm trying to say is that 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...

Jonathan shrugs.

JONATHAN

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 in front of him and takes a deep breath.

He looks back at the truck and finally decides to hobble over to Jonathan's 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

I'm barely thirty years-old. How'd you know I was a vet?

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, Teddy takes it.

TEDDY

Teddy Oliver.

Teddy looks for an obvious reaction from Jonathan, but 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 in and around to the back door.

INT. BASEMENT - DAY

Moldy and barren, except for smushed cardboard and empty beer cans.

Teddy rolls a pillow for easy carrying.

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

He rolls the blanket around the pillow and stands. He looks to a wall in the 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 much younger Jonathan, also.

Teddy shoves the pillow and blanket under an arm and buries his hands deep into the pockets of his trenchcoat, the ones with the push daggers in them.

INT. JONATHAN'S KITCHEN - DAY

Jonathan washes his hands at the sink.

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

TEDDY

You want one?

JONATHAN

No, thanks. There's plenty of room in the fridge if you want to stick 'em in there, though.

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

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

TEDDY

You got a family?

JONATHAN

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

Teddy gives a little 'ha'.

TEDDY

I just 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 in the basement. 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...

JONATHAN (CONT.)

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 at the irony. Jonathan can't help but smile, too.

JONATHAN

I have a little bit of a gambling problem and had a bad year a 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 it go by the way of the bank. I'm just glad I got back here 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. What makes you think I have a drinking problem?

TEDDY

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

Jonathan shrugs and lets it go.

JONATHAN

How about you? You from around here?

TEDDY

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

Teddy looks for the right 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 have a small bed up in the attic, if you'd rather sleep there. It's not getting too cold out yet.

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

FADE OUT

INT. JONATHAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

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

The bathroom light shines from under the crack.

The footsteps creep closer and closer and a shadow stands in front of Jonathan's door.

It pauses for an uncomfortable moment.

Finally, the shadow disappears into the bathroom and the light fades as the bathroom door softly 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 bathroom door opens again and the light reappears under the crack of the bedroom door.

The shadow stops again. Another long, uncomfortable moment.

Then, the bathroom light is switched off and footsteps creak back down the hallway and up the squeaky attic stairs.

Once gone, Jonathan closes his eyes again.

FADE TO BLACK

SOUND: Four loud THUDS on heavy wood. It's jarring.

INT. JONATHAN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Jonathan gasps and his eyes shoot open.

Four more loud thuds on the heavy door downstairs.

He throws a shirt on and slips into his sneakers.

INT. KITCHEN

Jonathan walks through and looks at the sink.

Twelve empty cans and two empty forties sit haphazard on the kitchen counter. He shakes his head at them.

Four more thuds from the living room. These ones mean business.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Jonathan opens up 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. Teddy. 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 that house over there?

Jonathan looks past the cop at the house.

Three cop cars sit in front. The officers stand in the front yard.

One of them has Teddy face down on the ground, handcuffed 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 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 thinks.

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 going and coming from here. Hundreds of them. What times you left. What times you came back.

Jonathan digests everything.

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 to Teddy on the ground, trying to keep 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.

The officer holding Teddy in the grass lifts him up and escorts him into one of the cruisers.

JONATHAN

Oliver.

It hits Jonathan, and the cop looks at him.

Jonathan has to swallow before he can speak.

JONATHAN

I think I know who he is...

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. Her name was Katie Oliver.

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

JONATHAN

I think that's her little brother. I should've recognized the name, but I didn't put it together until you said he had my mugshot.

The cop nods and shrugs.

COP

Well, for now we got him on criminal trespassing, and I'll hit him up for a menace by stalking. We might even be able to 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 Teddy sitting in the back seat of the
cruiser. He's calm.

INT. JONATHAN'S KITCHEN - DAY

Jonathan walks in and sees a note on the counter, an empty
forty weighting it down.

He picks it up. It's 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. I'd be lying if I said I
haven't thought about killing you.
Watching you die like I had to
watch my sister in the hospital.

Jonathan sits at the table and reads.

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 on what could make me feel
better, and then I thought about
you. 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.

Jonathan takes a deep breath.

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 note down and looks at all the empty beer
cans and two empty forty bottles 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 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.

Jonathan turns towards the refrigerator and a yellowed newspaper clipping catches his eye. He walks over to it.

TEDDY (V.O.)

I forgive you.

FADE TO:

INT. JONATHAN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Teddy stands at the sink. He opens and empties the cans of beer down the drain.

TEDDY (V.O.)

I know I want to live the way you have been, by giving yourself.

Teddy stops and walks over to the refrigerator. He notices an old newspaper clipping half-hidden under a coupon.

He pulls it out. An obituary picture of a young girl, Katie Oliver, 18.

Teddy kisses his finger and touches it to Katie's face.

He leaves the picture under a 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 walks back over and continues to pour the rest of the cheap beer down the sink.

FADE TO BLACK