POPULAR

Written by

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EXT. PARK - DAY

A metropolitan park is alive with activity on a normal day in the city.

A tall JOHN, 40s, dressed in the simplest of style walks a rather large German Sheperd to a bench near the playground. He taps the dog’s head, the Sheperd takes cue and lies down.

John surveys the many body movements. He spots a nerdy female teen, SARAH, away from the playground under a tree buried in a book.

The teen looks up to catch John looking at her. John holds up a hand to wave. She responds with a small wave and sweet smile.

John’s head turn to the sound of a group of teenagers buzzing about a picnic table. They’re obviously the créme de la créme of high school.

At the center of the group is a well-groomed BRENTON, 16, football jock and heart throb. He chats with his friend, TYLER, another jock.

TYLER
Dude, who are you asking to prom?

BRENTON
I dunno, bro. I’m thinking about asking Alysha.

Tyler’s eyes pop.

TYLER
Are you serious? Every guy in school probably asked her already.

Brenton’s responding smile is too confident.

BRENTON
I doubt it.

One of the gorgeous groupie teen girls, LISA, catches John staring at them.

LISA
Hey guys, that guy over there keeps staring at us.
TYLER
That dude’s always here. He creeps me out.

LISA
He’s probably a pedophile.

BRENTON
I’ll get him. Watch this.

Brenton makes way toward John.

John’s Shepard jumps to his feet and growls.

JOHN
Down Rex.

Brenton halts. Rex settles.

JOHN (CONT’D)
It’s fine. He’s just being cautious.

BRENTON
Yeah, whatever. Why do you keep staring at us? Do you have a problem?

JOHN
I’m not staring. I’m observing. I observe everyone at the park.

BRENTON
Well it’s creeping us out. I bet you’re probably some kind of pedophile. You better get the hell out of here before I call the police.

John smirks at Brenton’s cockiness. He pulls his phone out of his pocket and dials 911. He hands the phone to Brenton.

JOHN
I called them for you.

Brenton is thrown off by John’s bold gesture. John hangs up when the operator speaks.

BRENTON
Dude, what are you?

JOHN
Just another guy like you.
John catches Sarah approaching them with all smiles. Brenton stiffens, his face flushed with nerves. John notices.

Sarah ruffles Rex’s fur.

SARAH
Hi, Mr. John.

JOHN
Hello Sarah, how are you?

Sarah bows her head in Brenton’s presence. A fearful look on her face.

SARAH
The ice cream truck is here. I was wondering if you had a dollar so I could get a pop sickle.

JOHN
Of course, here.

John hands her a five dollar bill. Sarah brightens. Brenton is frozen stiff next to her.

JOHN (CONT’D)
Get whatever you want. Don’t worry about the change, you keep it.

SARAH
Thank you Mr. John.

Sarah avoids Brenton’s eyes and runs to the truck. Brenton relaxes. John smiles, amused.

JOHN
You need money too?

BRENTON
No. I have plenty of money.

JOHN
Then, why didn’t you offer to pay for her ice cream? It’s obvious you like her.

Brenton lets out an ego-centric laugh.

BRENTON
She’s a nerd, dude, not my type.
JOHN
There’s nothing wrong with nerds. I married a nerd once.

BRENTON
She died?

JOHN
No, divorce.

BRENTON
Cheated on you with another nerd?

John looks taken by his blunt questions.

JOHN
No. She matured and I refused to.

John notice Sarah taking her place back under the tree.

JOHN (CONT’D)
Rex, to Sarah, go.

Rex jumps up and crosses the park to Sarah. He lies down next to her and allow her to caress his fur.

BRENTON
What happened?

JOHN
Sit.

BRENTON
Why?

JOHN
Because it’s weird you standing over me like this, makes me look like a pedophile.

Brenton smirks, dose of his own medicine. Brenton sits. They watch Sarah play with Rex.

JOHN (CONT’D)
I was like you once, king of the mountain. I had the world in the palm of my hands. There wasn’t a person I couldn’t befriend and a girl I couldn’t get.

Brenton nods, he knows the feeling.
JOHN (CONT'D)
I thought I would be the popular guy forever. I didn’t care about school work because all my attention was spent making sure my oyster was my own.

Brenton looks at John now, with full attention.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I dropped out and worked in my uncle’s diner where I met her, my wife. She was perfect. She worked as a waitress to get through college. We dated for a while and got married.

BRENTON
Kids?

JOHN
Yeah, a son.

BRENTON
Where is he?

JOHN
With his mom, she took him when we divorced. She didn’t want anything she owned from our marriage, just my son.

Brenton eyes the ground unsure what to say.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I was a fool. Treated our marriage like some high school fling. I hung out with my guys more than I did with her. She was tired of the popular jock, she wanted a man. I never gave that to her and she left. Now it’s just me, Rex, dead end jobs and a crappy apartment.

The two fall silent. They watch Sarah play tug-a-war with Rex in the grass.

BRENTON
I don’t want to be like that.

JOHN
Then don’t. Trust me, in the real world, no one will care how popular you were in high school.

(MORE)
There’s no jobs out here looking for skills in popularity.

They share a hearty laugh. Then a moment pass.

Any dreams?

Brenton looks up to the sky. Passion glows on his face.

A pilot.

John joins in on the gaze at the clouds.

That’s a great dream. And one day, you will be.

Brenton looks at John. Hope in his eyes.

A car pulls up in the park. It’s Brenton’s mother, LAURIE, 40s, blonde.

Honey, are you ready?

Yeah, one sec.

Brenton hops off the bench.

Catch you later, Mr. John.

Nice meeting you too...

Brenton.

Brenton.

Brenton walks away before he turns back around.

How long are you usually out here?

I usually wait until Sarah’s father gets here to pick her up. He works late. I can’t leave her here alone in the park. Unless...
John gives Brenton a teasing smile.

**JOHN** (CONT’D)
Unless some generous person is willing to give her a ride home.

Brenton smirks at the hint. He walks to Sarah.

Sarah bows her head as he nears. Brenton gulps.

**BRENTON**
Hi Sarah.

Sarah avoids eye contact.

**SARAH**
(barely audible)
Hi.

**BRENTON**
I was wondering if you want a ride a home. Your house is on the way over so...

Sarah looks up a Brenton, her sparkling blue eyes cautious behind her full moon glasses. She’s cute.

**SARAH**
I guess so.

Brenton grabs Sarah’s back pack and walks with her to the car.

Brenton ignores his friends calling to him. He opens the door for Sarah and climbs in behind her.

Laurie looks over at John on the bench. The two exchange a warm smile and nod.

John waves as they drive away.

John pulls his wallet from his pocket. He flips through a small collection of photos beginning with a new born baby boy, to a boy toddler, a preteen boy, and last a recent high school picture of a teenage boy. The boy is Brenton.

Rex place his head on John’s knee.

**JOHN**
Baby steps, Rex. Baby steps.
John grabs Rex's leash and walks down the paved path out of the park.

FADE OUT.

THE END.

(CONT'D)