

POPULAR

Written by

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FADE IN:

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 Shepard to a bench near the playground. He taps the dog's head, the Shepard 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 crème de la crème 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)

Its 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 catch 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)

JOHN (CONT'D)
There's no jobs out here looking
for skills in popularity.

They share a hearty laugh. Then a moment pass.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Any dreams?

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

BRENTON
A pilot.

John joins in on the gaze at the clouds.

JOHN
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.

LAURIE
Honey, are you ready?

BRENTON
Yeah, one sec.

Brenton hops off the bench.

BRENTON (CONT'D)
Catch you later, Mr. John.

JOHN
Nice meeting you too...

BRENTON
Brenton.

JOHN
Brenton.

Brenton walks away before he turns back around.

BRENTON
How long are you usually out here?

JOHN
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 at 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)