

To  
The Class  
Of  
1982

By

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“So, whose idea was this anyhow?”

He actually ponders the question for a moment before the subtle, rhetorical inflections in her voice are recognized. She’s not actually asking him who did this, but rather why did you do this. Why the fuck did you drag me out here, back to this place, to its memories, to its ghosts? He knows that’s what she’s asking because he was about to ask her the same thing.

“Well, to be honest, I was under the impression it was your idea.” She rolls her eyes at the notion and lights a cigarette like she’s trying to punish it. All around them, young twenty something’s smile, laugh, point fingers, and scream at old acquaintances they haven’t seen in a decade. In other rooms, dwindling geriatrics swap stories of wars, droughts, winters, and grandchildren all thinking, but never stating that this may be the last decade for all of them.

From time to time, the isolated duo at the bar catches sidelong glances and instant lookaways from various patrons in the room. None of them had been there that night, but they all knew about it, and the rumors surrounding the only two survivors.

“They did a nice job restoring the place.” The need to start even the most rudimentary form of idle chatter finally overrode his tact prevention system.

“Yeah, you can hardly smell the charred flesh in the wood.” She leans forward and sniffs the counter top. “It’s almost back to the original pine.” She grins icily at him and snuffs her cigarette out on the laminated bar counter. She still hasn’t taken off her sunglasses. She refuses to justify the existence of any one else with even an eye glance. She’s above that. She’s above them. She moved out, got away, got cultured, wealthy, sophisticated. They stayed, stayed fat, stupid, and useless. “So, Brent, since you didn’t invite me and were still as idiotic as I was to show up here, tell me what’s been happening in your life.” She rests her chin in the palm of her hand and bats her eyes at him.

“Do you really care?”

“No, but what the hell else are we supposed to here?” He shrugs his shoulders and nods his head in agreement. He sickens at the thought of her, but she does have a point.

“Well, in that case, I guess you could say I’ve been in the philanthropy trade lately.”

“Philanthropy is not a trade dear, and I’ve always been under the impression that to be called a philanthropist, it was implied you came from a great deal of wealth.”

“What makes you think, I don’t?”

She chuckles slightly, “You’re not serious are you? You’re Brent Jenkins. You were voted most likely to be a bowling pin monkey. By the way, how many years did you save to buy that suit? It’s really quite nice.”

He stares at her for a moment with a total lack of expression. “Well, Karen, it’s nice to see that you’re adjusting to your new life as a burned out junkie actress with such ease. I was afraid that such a transition might turn you into a bitch.” She makes a kissing noise at him, downs her martini and orders another.

“Seriously, what have been doing?”

“You really don’t know?”

She shrugs her shoulders, “How would I? You said philanthropy, which by the way is an impressive word. What did you mean by that? You into something like the United Way?”

“No. I have my own organization. We help underprivileged children publish their poems and short stories.”

“Seriously?”

He nods, finishing his bourbon and water. “Yeah, we collect their work, put them in volumes, pick up the printing cost and send them out to libraries, book stores, anybody that wants them.”

“Wow! When did you learn to read and write?”

He glares at her, and orders another drink.

“Sorry, sweetie, we are who we are.”

“So, have you heard back from the studio on that Hamden part you auditioned for?”

She jerks like someone had just dropped ice down her back. “How did you know about that?”

“I follow the buzz in Hollywood. So have you heard anything?”

“No. My agent left before I had a chance to talk to her.”

“Well, I’ll save you the trouble; you didn’t get it.”

Her look of shock deepens. “How the hell would you know that?”

“Oh! Oh, I’m sorry. Didn’t I tell you? I wrote the screenplay. Yeah, I’m Joseph Hamden. In the biz we call that a pseudonym. You see we have a real name, but decide to write under a different....”

“I know what a fucking pseudonym is!”

“Anyways, I want you to know that I fought for you on that one. When you said that part was written for you, you weren’t lying. You were exactly the person I had in mind for that character.”

She beams slightly, “Really?”

“Oh, absolutely! The script was needing this vapid, soulless bitch of a character, and I couldn’t think of anyone else that would fit that mold better.”

He was expecting her refreshed martini splashing into his face at anytime, but she just seemed to sink, like someone had just let the air out of her.

“I suppose I deserved that.”

“Well, you did have it coming, but I could have shown a little restraint I suppose.”

“Truce?” She extends her hand.

“Truce.”

They sit silently for a while, watching the patrons mill about. Brent takes the time to scan the area in a little more detail. It all looks the same. Like nothing had changed. The same wallpaper, the same trim, even the same black and white photographs of outlaws, sheriffs, miners, and of course, Chinese railroad workers which the Green Dragon Hotel had been built for. All in all, it was starting to creep him out. Memories he had spent thousands in therapy eradicating came floating by. For a moment he thought he recognized one of the faces in the crowd. Someone he had known a long time ago. But he just shrugged it off.

“So, why did you show up for this?” She asks just above a whisper.

“That is the question isn’t it? I don’t know. I haven’t even been back in Wyoming for over fifteen years.”

“Yeah, me neither.”

“Why did you come back?”

“C’mon Brent, don’t play ignorant. I came back for the same reason you did. Because we were ordered to.”

His therapist had spent years convincing him that that part of his memory had been completely fabricated. That he had dreamed up some fantastic rationalization to deal with the guilt of surviving when so many people close to him had died. And now, this bitter wreck of a woman just confirmed that he had wasted a lot of time and money in Dr. Fitzman’s office.

“My therapist told me that was all bullshit.”

“So did mine.”

The silence that follows for what seems like an eternity is suddenly broken by Karen gasping and dropping her glass to the floor.

“What?” She has turned so pale she seems translucent. The only response she can muster is one hand over her mouth and the other on her chest. She finally takes her sunglasses off. “What? Karen, what’s wrong?”

“I saw him!”

“Who?” He looks around the room, searching for whoever could have shaken so visibly.

“Sam Ketchin!”

“The Spiral? Man, you know he could have gone pro. He could throw like a god!”

“Do you think this shit is funny?”

“No, but I think you’re letting your imagination get away with you. For a minute, I thought I saw Kim Stratton over there by the stuffed grizzly. Our minds are playing trick on us, that’s all.”

“I don’t like this at all, not one bit.”

“Look, what did you think was going to happen? We witnessed a horrible tragedy in this very place, and I’m sure we both have some unresolved issues about it. I came here to put some of that shit to rest. Why did you come here?”

“I guess to prove, that I wouldn’t let anything scare me. Looks like I failed there, huh?”

“Don’t worry about it. This is going to help the both of us, you’ll see. I’ve spent my life running from this place, but it was always there, smirking at me from the back of my mind. Tell me it’s been any different for you.”

“No. You’re right. It’s just.....”

“Yeah, I know. Let’s talk about something else for a while. You never had a family did you?”

“No. I....I just couldn’t justify it, you know.

“What do you mean?”

“Look at me! I’m a walking spokesperson for anti-depressants. I wouldn’t dare bring a kid into that mess.”

“But you don’t know. A kid might have helped, might have straightened you out, gave you something to live for.”

“My mom used to tell me that, and you both might be right, but I don’t think so. Some damage is just too deep.” They sit quietly together and stare at the floor for a while. “So what about you? Wife? Kids?”

“Divorced, two boys.”

“Why the divorce?”

“A minor disagreement.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, she felt that I was an immature, inept, weakling of a boy with no future. I disagreed.”

She chuckles slightly, in spite of herself. “You always were funny. I remember that Elvis Costello impression you used to do in the foyer before class. That’s still one of the funniest things I’ve ever seen.”

“Aw, yes. Though a shameful moment in my past, it did keep me from being beaten up by the Seniors, even when I was a Senior.”

They both laugh for a moment, then stop abruptly. This time they both see the same thing. Mary Louise Dens, the homecoming queen of 1982, smiling and waving at them both. With jaws dropped and air stuck in their throats, they wave back.

“Maybe we should talk about what happened that night.” He says as he watches the phantom stroll into the ballroom.

“Ok.” She replies trembling.

“You said we were ordered to come back here. That sounds familiar, but I just can’t grasp it. It’s like trying to remember a dream.”

“I’m the same way. But, I remember something....about a lottery? Maybe? And some sort of agreement.”

“Yeah, yeah we were allowed to live, only if we agreed to come back-”

“In twenty years.”

“-In twenty years. Son of a bitch.”

“Well, what else? C’mon think! Were we supposed to do anything, bring anything, what?”

*“The two of you were supposed to live lives worth living, and then validate that charge upon your return.”*

They stare at each other, both trembling, Karen with tears in her eyes and Brent not far behind her. Like a long forgotten scent, the voice speaking to them floods their minds with the tragic event of that long ago night with hi-definition, surround sound, quality. Slowly they turn to the owner of the voice, the bartender idly toweling off a clean beer glass. Having seen this creature before, their shock and revulsion at the faceless man is slightly lessened.

Karen is the first to speak. Brent wanted to be, but just couldn't get the words to come out right. A writer's worst nightmare.

"Who are you?"

*"My name is of no real importance here. You know that."*

"Then, what are you?" Brent finally asks.

*"That is an important question. However, it is quite irrelevant at this point."* The faceless man finishes wiping the glass, peers through it without eyes and hangs it up.

*"No, the question that you should be asking is; What am I going to do with you now?"*

"Fine. What are you going to do with us?" Brent's confidence is rising. Push the little geek far enough, and he will eventually push back.

*"That is all going to depend on how well this evening's show turns out."*

"Show?"

*"Of course! I've entitled it, 'The Tale of Two Civvies'. Clever, wouldn't you agree?"*

Karen breaks in with a trembling voice, "I don't understand." The faceless man gestures to the room behind them with overacted elegance in his hands. They turn around. Karen screams and Brent back climbs onto the bar counter. During their conversation, they had failed to notice the rooms drop in noise. That silence is blaring now. Where there once stood a few dozen reunion goers now stands a few hundred faceless, erect drones, all mimicking the appearance of the bartender.

"What the fuck is going on?" Brent can feel his sanity slipping away, and by the look on Karen's face, hers has done left the building.

*"WE ARE THE EXTRAS!!!"* The crowd echoes out in unison, bowing mechanically, and then breaking into a mass square dance. The two watch in horror as the crowd of faceless monsters dance and do-se-do, across and around the bar room with no music save for the rhythmic stomping of their feet. As time goes by, the crowd seems to part like the fabled Red Sea, dividing in a schism that leads to the entrance of the ballroom. When the entrance to the ballroom comes completely into view, the crowd stops, drops to their knees, stretching their hands out towards another group of people standing in the entrance way.

*"AND WE ARE THE CAST!!!"* The two at the bar know every face in this new crowd. They are faces that haunt them in deep dreams, the faces that reassure them that nothing in this world is beautiful, the faces of the past.

One from the crowd comes forward. A mousey brunette with a tiny frame, wearing a gymnast's one-piece and twirling a baton. Peggy Ann Montgomery, captain of the cheerleading squad.

"And you," she pauses to perform a cartwheel, backhand spring, and a twirl towards them, "are the stars!"

Karen can no longer feel the capacity for rational thought. She remembers Peggy Ann, she was her first sexual experience with another woman, (ironically, she was also

Brent's). But, this creature was only a copy, a faint outline of the bouncing girl's former self. This one was sinister, cold, plastic. Karen couldn't envision a sight worse than the mockery of this girl's tender innocence. That is until she felt the heat coming off of the girl. Emanating and flowing like a wave. The more it intensified the fiercer the girl laughed. She laughed and laughed until the melting of her face turned the laughter into shrieking howls of agony. Then nobody was laughing.

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