

Chance

Nothing good comes from a tap on the window. Such a thought occurred to him as a tap on the driver's side glass jostled him from the aimless scrolling on his phone. *Fuck, did I piss this guy off somehow? Who the hell tries to talk to someone in their car? Why the hell am I even here in the first place? She's just causing me nothing but trouble lately.* He rolled down his window just enough to let sound through.

"Uh, yeah?"

"Yeah, hey man, mind if I talk to you face-to-face?"

I'm about to get decked, aren't I? I guess I earned it. Pretty roundabout way for Karma to get its revenge but I guess it had to be one way or another. He slipped a pocket knife into his pants, unlocked the door, and stepped out apprehensively. The man appeared slightly unkempt to Tyler, sporting torn jeans, a faded sweatshirt that was fleshed more with pocket possessions than the mass of his torso, and a simple buzzed haircut.

"Heh, no need to be all jumpy dude I'm not gonna try anything funny, just trying to kill some time and you look like someone who's cool to smoke a little."

"I mean, I am, but that's an awfully bold assumption. I try to come off as pretty square."

"Haha, I just had...a hunch I guess. I come here to give my buddy a ride home a lot, so I know a good spot if you wanna follow." He gestured in the general direction of some woodland on the peripheral of the parking lot.

"Right, I'm just going to follow some rando into the woods. You may as well wear a sandwich board that says *I'm a serial killer.*"

The other guy chuckled, "yeah you gotta good point. Well there's a lotta people and cameras around here—even if I was some Zodiac killer I'd know better than to fish here. I ain't a cop or nothin', see?" He shook a baggie of pre-rolled joints like someone would shake some keys for a cat.

“That doesn’t mean shit, undercovers can possess. Let me see you take a hit and then maybe I’ll believe you.” Nearly before he had finished the sentence, there was a lit joint being inhaled.

He torqued the guy’s front away from the entrance of the building, “Christ, you idiot—I believe you.”

The duo meandered for a few minutes into the foliage that framed the parking lot until they arrived at a decently secluded shed which they could use to obscure any view of them. The stranger perched himself against the shed and began fishing around in his overstuffed pockets. It looked as though the seams were about to give way from all the possibilities he must have been prepared for.

“You gotta name?” he asked, genuinely curious more than making conversation.

“Tyler,” Tyler replied.

“Heh yeah you look like one. Here.” He handed Tyler one of the joints he had jingled in front of him. “That’s a great strain, man,” he assured, “I think it’s called Asynchronous.”

“That doesn’t matter much to me, I’m not a connoisseur or something,” Tyler remarked. He roasted the tip enough for it to begin to smoke. He pressed it to his lips and only brought the smoke into his mouth, pretending to inhale. *Don’t take candy from a stranger—doubly so for drugs.* He checked his phone to see if he was tardy from his obligations.

“She reply yet?” the stranger asked.

“No, not yet-” Tyler paused. He gave a tense and puzzled look towards his new “pal,” but he seemed not to notice, looking deeply into the clouds. *Okay I think it’s time to leave.* He started a few steps away from the guy.

“Well thanks, but I gotta-”

“They won’t be done for another 15 minutes or so, dude.”

“...What?”

"I mean, it's just a hunch."

A slight breeze rustled the leaves of the surrounding flora, but it sounded like radio static. Tyler's head was hot from confusion. He folded out the pocket knife he brought and held it pointed.

"Who the hell are you?"

"Whoa! Take it easy man, I'm just messing around!"

"No, it's more than that. What do you know about me?" Tyler pinned the stranger's shoulder to the shed and pressed the blade to his chest. The knife shook from his nervous grip.

"Chill, dude, chill. I'll tell you everything—just chill." His arms were lifted in surrender like antennas to heaven, though they resembled clock hands in their lankiness. Tyler eased up, surprised at himself.

"Alright, you're not gonna take me for serious but it's the truth. We've met before. Not just before, but, like, less than an hour ago. It was a *different* you, but still you, I dunno how else to explain it. You're not the only one, I see dupes of people all the time. I see 'em at different businesses, different places—it's usually small stuff like they have a different job or haircut or something."

"Whoa, whoa, backup. What? *What?* You expect me to believe this?!"

"No man, I told you you wouldn't get it. Look, I can prove it. You messed around and got in trouble at your school and now you have to take summer classes, and you don't even know what you wanna study. You're here waiting for your ladyfriend and her kid niece to get done swimming."

What the fuck? The static of the leaves got louder, and Tyler felt lightheaded. He rubbed his forehead as it throbbed. It probably wasn't helping that he accidentally inhaled a little bit of the grass.

"Yeah...yeah, that's exactly right. Just...how?"

"Honest, dude. I told you I met you, or like a version of you I guess."

"This has to be a joke. You're just a stoner who's doped off his ass."

"Heh, I wish that were the case bud. It happens whether I'm sober or not. You know how weird it is to just deal with seeing dupes everywhere?"

Tyler leaned against a tree, buckling from nausea. He checked his phone for some semblance of reality, but it didn't have any bars.

He probed further, "When? Where did we meet? What was I doing?"

"I was just at the liquor store before coming here. You know the one by the campgrounds with the playground out front? You were there with a chick and a little girl, and they were playing on the swings. You seemed pretty bored so I asked if you wanted to smoke, and you were *way* more chill. You told me all that stuff about you while we were killing time. Even gave me your number so we could hang."

To say this was surreal would be an understatement. Every fiber of Tyler incredulous. He thought he was uncertain of life before, but this was an entirely different magnitude.

He still searched for some logical footing, "Am I the first person you've told this to?"

"Nah, but I guess you're the first person who's taken me for real. Normally when I tell people I've seen them doing something else they're like *no way dude*. Plus, you're the first *new* copy I've seen. This has been happening to me since I was a kid, but it's always been the same couple dozen folks for years. But now there's you. I don't really get it, so I figured I'd talk to you here since I didn't expect you would turn up again as a copy."

"Is there something in common between all the people you see doubles of? Have you ever *stopped* seeing anyone?"

"Hmm...now that you mention, yeah I think there's a few people who've stopped popping up. I'm not really sure what caused it, it's pretty weird that there can be new ones. Maybe it's cuz you're, like, confused?"

"Who the hell wouldn't be confused about this!?"

“No, no, like confused about *you*. Who you are, what you want. You know, *you*. Every time I see a doppelganger, it’s not crazy differences, you know? That’s why it’s so confusing. I’ll have a conversation with one, then see them somewhere else and they don’t know who I am anymore. It’s hard to tell what’s real and what’s...less real?”

“Well, then what’s different about me compared to...*me*?”

“Well, seems like you’re really uncertain about what you want, dude. The other you didn’t look like he was too hot for...uh, *your* jee-ef. Kinda felt like he—you—were gonna dip on her. I mean, I’ve known you for like an hour tops so I don’t know anything about your biz, but I think you’re just anxious about change in your life. You have a lot of good stuff going for you. She seems happy with you. Take it from me, don’t let your inner wacko mess up what’s good. Just take some time and really think about what you think you oughta do instead of just going with the motions. You only get one chance to do stuff.”

Tyler slumped down and sat against the shed. The sickliness seemed to be waning, but now there was numbness in his head.

“Can’t believe I’m hearing this from you of all people.”

“Heh, like a blind-future seer kind of deal, right? Ha. Yeah, life can be funny like that sometimes. In fact, my life’s never not funny.” He extended a hand towards Tyler and helped him up.

Tyler conceded, “Maybe we can hang again sometime.”

“Heh, sure man, I’ll hit you up next time I’m nearby.”

As they walked back to the lot, Tyler’s pocket buzzed after finally getting signal. He read the message with a new fondness.

Kayla: Hey we're in the car, where are you? Also, mind if we stop to get some booze on the way home? :) One of my friends is in town for...

Another buzz quickly followed.

924-188-1429: heyyy its Chance lol
lets hang again soon!