

A River Called Solitude
Day 31

by
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Title

CHARACTERS

CHARACTER, des.
CHARACTER, des.

SETTING

Where you at?

TIME

Wibbly Wobbly Timey Wimey

1.

The desert. A man sits on the ground. A campfire is turning to embers. He's decided not to add wood to it. As he contemplates the fire, a young boy, 7 or 8, enters behind him, watching the man. The man doesn't look.

MAN

They send you to guard me?

(Beat)

I know you're back there.

BOY

I have a gun.

MAN

No you don't.

BOY

I do. No sudden moves.

The man stands, turns to face the boy.

MAN

I want to give you a better shot.

The boy laughs, the man laughs.

MAN

Come over and sit.

The boy comes close, sits. The man sits.

BOY

Why does it get so cold. It was real hot today.

MAN

The heat comes from the sun, without it, the desert gets cold. There's nothing out here to hold onto the heat. It slips from the earth like water through your fist. Too bad we can't grab a hold of it, keep it in the palm of your hand.

BOY

You're talking strange.

MAN

That's what the desert does to you.

Silence.

MAN

What's your plan?

BOY

What plan?

MAN

How do you plan on staying out here?

BOY

I'm just going to stay.

MAN

When the farmstead wakes up, they'll come looking.

BOY

Not if they know you're out here. They're all afraid of you.

MAN

They're not.

BOY

My papa is.

MAN

Mad is not the same as afraid.

BOY

He's afraid. He said, "You don't know what he's capable of."

MAN

Say anything else?

BOY

Said you can't be trusted.

MAN

Hm.

BOY

Called you reprehensible. Said he can't wait to put the last nail in your coffin himself.

MAN

That's just cruel.

Silence.

MAN

You bring a blanket.

BOY

No. Didn't know it'd be cold.

MAN

Fair. Bring food?

BOY

They didn't let you bring anything.

MAN

True. But you chose to come out here.

BOY

What do you eat?

MAN

I catch some critters here and there.

BOY

You don't have a gun.

MAN

Caught a jackrabbit.

BOY

How?

MAN

My bare hands.

BOY

No.

MAN

Caught a rattlesnake today.

BOY

No you didn't.

MAN

Lifted him up by his tail, smashed his head on a rock and had him for lunch.

BOY

You're a liar.

MAN

Call me a lot of things, but not a liar.

2.

They're walking by a river, which is more of a muddy ditch this time of year.

BOY

We can't drink that.

MAN

It's the only water.

BOY

It's muddy.

MAN

There's not another bit of water for miles and miles. You'd never make it in the heat of the day. Drink up.

BOY

No.

MAN

Then you better head home. This is the way out here. The animals out here feed you, the river quenches your thirst.

BOY

This isn't a river.

MAN
To the desert this is a river.

BOY
Then what's its name?

MAN
Hm?

BOY
If it's a river, it has a name.

MAN
I call it Solitude.

BOY
That's a stupid name for a river.

MAN
Stupid or no, that's its name.

3.

They sit on rocks, legs crossed. They've found a little bit of shade under some larger rocks. It's the heat of the day. Their eyes are closed. After a moment, the boy peeks.

MAN
Keep your eyes closed.

BOY
What are we doing?

MAN
Dreaming.

BOY
I can't sleep sitting up.

MAN
Didn't say anything about sleeping. I said we're dreaming.

BOY
You can only dream when you sleep.

MAN

That's not true. Close your eyes.

The boy closes his eyes.

MAN

Now breathe. Listen to the rhythm of your heart. And breathe.

They sit and breathe. The boy tries really hard to listen to his heart.

4.

They hide behind a rock, stalking something.

MAN

You see them?

BOY

I see.

MAN

That jackrabbit. She'll be our lunch. Her man over there will be dinner. You don't leave a man without his woman. Better to kill him.

BOY

When do we pounce?

MAN

Just keep quiet and wait. Quiet. Don't move.

The man suddenly stands, quick draws a gun, and fires off two shots.

BOY

Holy shit!

MAN

Watch your mouth.

BOY

You got 'em both!

MAN

Of course I got 'em both.

BOY

Wait, you have a gun?

MAN

Tell you a secret. I snuck back into town one night. Town was sleeping. I let myself into the sheriff's house. Walked right up to his bedroom, he and his wife sleeping sound. Sheriff's wife snores like a wild horse, whinnying. I open the sheriff's nightstand, pull out this beauty and let myself out. Grabbed a few handfuls of bullet's too.

Beat.

BOY

Why didn't you kill him?

MAN

It wasn't his fault.

(Beat)

Are you an uncle yet?

BOY

No.

MAN

Next time you come out here and find me, let me know.

BOY

I'm not going back.

MAN

You have to watch over your sister.

BOY

She doesn't need me.

MAN

She does.

BOY

You're coming back?

MAN

Not so sure about that. Why don't you grab Mr. and Mrs. Jackrabbit. I'm starving.

5.

A campfire has almost completely gone out. Their bellies are full of Mr. Jackrabbit. The boy is starting to fall asleep.

MAN

Go ahead and sleep.

BOY

Don't want to.

MAN

If you're tired, sleep.

BOY

Don't want to.

MAN

Your body does.

BOY

No.

MAN

Well, sleep or don't sleep. I'm going to sleep.

The man lies down, settles in on the ground. The boy struggles and then decides to surrender. He's asleep in no time. After a moment, the man sits up. He crosses to the boy, careful not to wake him. He stares down at him and makes a decision.

6.

Sunrise, at the edge of town. The boy is asleep on the ground. A young girl, around 16, enters. She's pregnant, somewhere around 7 or 8 months. She looks down at the boy. He stirs awake, confused by his surroundings, then disappointed, then angry. He notices his sister.

BOY

Were you out looking for me?

GIRL

That why you ran off? Hoping we'd come after you?

BOY
Was Papa angry?

GIRL
Papa's got all his anger directed at me. He has no anger left for you.

BOY
What about Mama?

GIRL
She's furious. You frightened the hell out of her.

BOY
Good.

GIRL
Glad you're happy. I'm pissed at you, too.

BOY
What reason you got to be pissed?

GIRL
Come on home.

BOY
No.

GIRL
I'm not doing all your chores again today.

BOY
They had you do my chores?

GIRL
Someone had to.

He stands.

BOY
Fine. For you.

She nods, smiles. They start walking. After a moment:

GIRL
How did he look?

Good.

BOY

She nods.

You ever dream without being asleep?

BOY

Every night.

GIRL

Lights fade as they exit.