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Mr. Mitchell

English B41A

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Super Movie

We sat at the curb.

The sun was beginning to set, which meant it hung slightly above the roof tops of the buildings facing us. The nape of my neck was still hot to the touch from when it was at its highest, and the soles of my shoes still held onto the heat from the pavement, only adding to the uncomfortable amount of moisture in my socks. And the heatwaves continued to rise from the ground, and the hordes of people arriving at the dingy car wash didn't stop, and the cherry-red from James' snow cone continued to drip into the murky water beneath us—summer.

I reached into my backpack—overly expensive and all black—and pulled out the vintage camera that meant the world to me. I aimed it at the black Impala that was pulling in—vintage just like my camera—that was undoubtedly following the herd of people before it. I began filming, the fainting sunlight still allowing its glimmering chrome lining and smooth paint job to showcase its dangerous allure. “Perfect,” I said, in utter admiration.

James smacked my mouth lightly and said, “you perk your lips whenever you make a T sound.” I lowered the camera, put a hand to my lips and said, “only you would notice that.” He just smirked, his pink lips covered in the cherry-red of the snow cone, and his dimpled cheeks barely free of any stains; so, I smacked him back and bolted towards the Snow Shack that continued to attract customers like bees to a hive.

I dodged past the rainbow-faced children, like a spaceman dodging asteroids, and maneuvered behind the slim trunk of one of the palm trees. Each of us held a hand to the trunk, circling around like kids without a worry in the world. And just like when we were kids, James would catch me—I was a spaceman lacking a rocket. Then I saw it: the black Impala. I faked left, but went right, jumping over one of the baby-blue benches that lined the Snow Shack, and skidded the hood of the vintage car, my butt feeling the burn of the hot metal as I did.

“I have a bad feeling about this!” I shouted.

James stopped in his tracks, panting, and using his white T to wipe off some of the cherry-red dye from his lips, “I have a bad feeling about this,” he said. I raised both arms, he did the same, and we smiled in mutual understanding of the sacred pact: if things ever went too far, we’d recite the running gag in all Star Wars movies, and we’d know to stop. Our surface level differences called for a safe word, because a lot of the time we couldn’t put up with each other, yet we were the type of best friends that never left each other’s side. James and Byron against the world.

“My camera,” I explained.

“Really?” He asked. “Or is it because you don’t want your outfit ruined?” He saw right through me. “Is that why you wouldn’t get a snow cone?” He shook his head as he asked this, because he already knew the answer, and because he knew the real reason too—Rosario. “She’s changing you, man.” He said.

He began to walk away with one hand tucked into a pocket, and the other running through his golden hair. The sunlight kindled his entire person with the rays that peeked from between the gaps in the buildings—it was a sight I couldn’t help but film. On camera, his signature swagger translated seamlessly; a heavy brawler-esque walk reminiscent of a British

street thug—“perfect,” I thought. Only this time it was riddled with genuine resentment, followed by an indignant hanging of his head as he sat on the same baby-blue bench I had jumped over.

I walked over to him. As I did, a sharp mist of water stippled the back of my neck. My shoulders jolted upwards instantly, and as I turned to spot its origin I noticed the black Impala owner; he was using one of the manual car wash slots that shared business space with the Snow Shack. And for the first time I noticed he had a teardrop tattoo, among many others, and I was pretty sure he had sprayed me on purpose. “Not tonight, asshat—I have enough going on,” I thought to myself.

I put a hand on James’ shoulder. “Do you really not like Rosario?” I asked. He looked up at me with his sullen green eyes, then looked away and scrunched up his face—ruminating. Ruminating pretty hard. Ruminating so hard, his left eyebrow began to raise much higher than his right, like a tiny mountain peak. I squeezed his shoulder, “Well?”

“I only have one thing to say about Rosario,” he said. I said nothing. He wrapped his arms around himself, so that his left hand held onto his right bicep, and his right hand held onto his left bicep, until finally he said, “I have a bad feeling about this.” I squeezed tighter. “AH!” He grunted. And slapping my hand away, he said, “you know, if you were anyone else I’d kick your ass right about now.”

“I know,” I said.

“Now, get out bikes lover boy!”

...

I traced the cracks in the glass with a finger, and watched the world speed by.

Rosario sat in the passenger seat of the black Impala with her legs crossed, and her long brown curls swept to the left so that I couldn't see her face from the backseat. Tear-Drop guy manned the chrome plated wheel. James sat to my left, his pale hands a bright red, veins protruding. And I in utter disbelief of what was happening—the more I thought about it, the more I realized she was right.

She turned to face me then, her face reminiscent of a swan from the side. She lifted her full cheeks into a smile, and batted her heavy lashes like the wings of a butterfly, until finally she winked. Everything seemed so different from the night before:

James and I circled our bikes around the parking lot of the burger joint. Rosario's shift would be over early, on account of her persuading her gross boss to let her go home. "I heard she lives at the trailer park," James said. It was true. "And there's rumors," he went on. "She's my trailer park starlet," I mumbled, "and she's also the hottest girl in school." Also, true. He rode away, and attempted a trick to pass the time. "She's elusive!" I shouted. He quickly rode back to me, looked me dead in the eyes and said, "you and your big words." I said nothing. His disregard for her was beginning to irritate me. But he got closer and said, "big words mean nothing if there's no depth to them."

I shoved him.

We were off our bikes then, chests touching, and eyes locked in a stare down—blue versus green, like lightsabers in a heated dual. I wanted to punch him in that pretty face of his, despite how stupid and useless it was to try. He was a star baseball player, and I was a self-described amateur filmmaker—he wouldn't break a sweat. "You know just how to get under my skin, don't ya?" I asked, rhetorically. He just rolled his eyes, and forced a smile, "look, I don't wanna fight." He punched my shoulder lightly and said, "just don't forget to use protection."

Jesus.

“Your girl’s out,” he said, motioning his head to what was behind me. Then he rode off. “Neither of us said it!” I shouted. He slowed, “huh?” he said. I lifted my arms, “the pact.” But he only shook his head, and said nothing.

...

I sat alone in the Impala.

Sunrise was nearing—the sky a deep navy, inner mixed with shards of orange and yellow. Rosario was already enthusiastically running towards the overpass, Tear-Drop guy following her at a stalking pace, and James leaned against the front hood of the car. He still wore the same clothes, still covered in the red dye from his cherry snow cone from what felt like a lifetime ago. But it’d really only been a few hours—a few hours since Rosario and I lay in her tiny bed, with the dangly dream-catchers about our heads. A few hours since she revealed to me that Tear-Drop guy was her boyfriend, and that I was in love with James and not her.

I hated being told who I was, and I especially hated that she was right. I’d always prided myself in my own self-awareness, yet here I was trembling like a child lost in a vast department store, unsure of where safety and comfort was—everything about me felt like a lie.

“For someone so ‘self-aware’ you’re not very self-aware,” she had said, “but it isn’t your fault. The world has a way of telling us who we are—who we’re supposed to be. They put us in a box. Which is why I’m leaving. But as much as it is important to know yourself, you can’t forget to consider other people’s feelings, and to remember that it isn’t always about you.” Because apparently, I hadn’t just missed by own signs, but James’ too—she was positive he felt the same way. “If you promise to put your ego aside,” she had said, “I’ll give you the perfect opportunity to tell him—you’re my last stop before planet B-612.” I had agreed.

She was romanticizing herself, and the thing is, I don't think she realized it—as wise as she seemed, she was still just sixteen, too. *Planet B-612—The Little Prince, a children's book.*

Even before we reached them, I could feel the subtle tremble of the overpass as the speeding cars rushed below us. And the closer we got to the short railing, the more wind swayed us, and the more terrifyingly-exhilarated I felt. Rosario had gone a few feet away with Tear-Drop guy so James and I could be alone together, at the center of the overpass, overlooking the vast horizon of natural and artificial glimmer. “So, Rosario has a boyfriend?” James asked. “Yeah,” I said, “and I want you to know that I'm sorry about last night. I shouldn't have shoved you.” He seemed indifferent to the apology. And I began to tremble; I reached for my camera, and began filming the brilliance of the rising sun. It was like a movie scene; I could see why this was Rosario's favorite place—an overpass seemingly in the middle of nowhere. “Do you think I watch too many movies?” I asked. “It's like all you do,” he said, matter-of-factly. “I only ask because Rosario helped me realize something.” I waited for a response; but he responded in silence. “I don't know myself as well as I thought,” I said. His strong grip met my shoulder, “none of us do—we're just kids.” *Just kids.*

I turned to face him, “and we romanticize ourselves,” I said. He shook his head, “is that what she helped you realize?” He asked. I continued, “I've been putting myself in the shoes of these protagonist, these leading men that always get the girl and...” He interjected, “and you're mad you didn't get her?” His voice raised, and his green eyes glistened as they glazed over. “NO—and they always get the girl. Always. And I thought—I guess I was conditioned, in a way, to always want that too. But I don't, James.” I could feel his breath on my face as it grew heavier, as he began to put the pieces together.

“I want you,” I said.

A bright cherry-red began filling the soft curve of his cheeks. “Don’t walk away,” I said. “So, don’t do this shit to me!” He shouted. “And why did it take her for you to figure this out?” He asked. “Because, she’s just as crazy as I am,” I said, “and she’s smarter than I am, smarter than people give her credit. But you’re right, we’re just kids. She may have figured this out about me, but she’s running off with some tattooed thug after today—she wanted to save me from myself, all a part of her self-imposed hero story. Not she, nor I, or anyone have shit figured out as much as we think we do.” I could feel tears welling up. “I thought you always had things figured out,” he mumbled. “Well, I guess I don’t.” He rubbed the tears from his eyes, “yet you’re so sure that you ‘want me’ that you brought me all the way out here to tell me.”

“Yes.” I said. His shoulders slumped over, and he turned away from me, “I do too,” he whispered.

Holy shit.

I reached for one of his hands, the one he had balled up into a fist, and undid it. His warm fingertips followed the lead of mine, our hands interlocking. In a split second, he pulled me in for a strong embrace, and I could feel the wet of his tears on my neck, and the soft tremble of sobs being held back. In the heat of the moment, my camera had fallen to the ground. I reached down for it, and checked it for any damage. “What kind of camera is that anyway?” He asked. “It’s a Super 8 camera—it was my dad’s.” I said. “Let me see,” he said. He took the camera, and began filming the remainder of the sunrise. “I guess our lives do seem like a movie sometimes,” he said.

“No,” I said, “like a super movie.”