

I'll Be Seeing You

(excerpt)

by

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CAST:

JONAH - early 20's

We're someplace in the Nevada desert, the present day. Billie Holliday sings.

JONAH: I hate snow. Fucking hate it. When I see a snowy road at night, which isn't often now, I see a slideshow in my mind -

My sister's car tilted on the shoulder, its door hanging open, snow up to its bumper, snow melting inside, in its mouth. In her mouth.

No, not in her mouth. She wasn't in the car when they found it. Sometimes it's hard to tell which things you saw and which you just imagined.

Here's what I know: There was a blizzard New Year's Eve. It caught her somewhere on the road.

Maybe she left her car and went to a friend's to ride it out. Or walked to a gas station and it was closed. Maybe she went into the road, waved down a passing car, got inside and...

We wake up on New Year's Day, my mother and I. We wait. We wait. We call her friends. We call her phone. It goes to voicemail. We call the police.

The detective arrives, he shakes my hand. His voice is reassuring.

How old is Darcy?

She's nineteen.

Does she have a boyfriend?

No, not that I know.

Are you two close?

Best friends.

Did she ever talk about leaving? Feeling depressed? Hurting herself?

No. Jesus, no.

He brings out the statistics. Kidnappings in winter are rare. Most kidnap victims are underage. It's likely that Darcy just left. He's seen cases like this before, in a few months she'll settle down somewhere and call us.

It'll be alright, he says and pats my shoulder. I take his card, just in case.

Then they find the car in the snow.

She doesn't call, not that month or the next. Instead we get the lost and paranoid, the backyard psychics, the creeps with inside knowledge of satanic cults preying on young girls. Strangers calling to say they're praying for us. Sometimes they light candles on our lawn. The pastor comes by once and holds my mother's hand. When she cries, he cries.

By now I can't go for a walk in town without seeing Darcy's face. I run into her at the bank, the florist, the car wash. She's even in the box office at the cinema. I swear I look at her more than when she was alive. Or, more than I remember looking at her.

That spring, at my high school graduation, I get my diploma and the audience gives me a standing ovation, as if I'd won a prize. Wherever I go I carry Darcy's absence with me. We are inseparable.

Now, I lied to that detective. The truth is Darcy wanted to leave town. She said she'd take me with her to Las Vegas as soon as she had money.

I think about it too, now that she is gone, but I stay. I drive a forklift for a while, then do repairs in a furniture shop. When the shop closes I get by on unemployment.

I spend my free time driving, breaking into boarded up houses, hanging around trailer parks. I don't find what I'm looking for.

The news van has stopped coming, there's no more vigils on our doorstep. The rumour now is Darcy got knocked up and left. I don't believe them, but who's to say they're wrong? People get tired of wondering. People need closure.

It's only later, when my mother dies - after she drinks herself to death - I sell the house and leave for good. Figure I'll try it out in California. Then, halfway to the coast, driving through the dead zone of Nevada I pass the first exit for Las Vegas and...I flinch. I see the second one and put on my turn signal.

That night, driving back to my motel from a party on the Strip I almost pass out at the wheel. But when I finally stumble in and shut the door I think - nobody's watching me. Nobody knows my name. Nobody pities me enough to call a taxi or even ask if I'm okay. And when I wake up tomorrow, hungover, nobody will care. It's a good feeling.

The next day I decide to stay another night. Then that night turns to three. And then I get a job in a casino. The night shift in security. I help an older guy named Duke who once worked in the entourage of John Belushi. We roam the floor checking ID's, weeding out pickpockets and drunks. It's mostly me who intervenes though, I only call Duke when there's trouble because he has the gun. He tells me about the parties in Belushi's limo, how it's a shame he died so young. This place, he says, and looks around - is where guys like me go to die.

Sometimes, after hours, we catch a show at one of the locals bars and later, if the night is warm, we drive into the desert for a beer under the stars. I don't remember seeing stars in Ohio but here they fill the sky from one end to the other. It makes me dizzy looking at them. And all around us there are others - shadows in the rocks, doing what they're not supposed to be doing or doing it with the wrong people. And I remember in the Bible it says the desert is where Satan lives. That's why they built it here, Sin City. A temple to temptation. I tell Duke all this and he laughs.

I don't tell Duke about my sister. I never say

her name, not even to myself. I live from season to season, just like the buildings of Las Vegas. There's no history here, that helps. The only thing you can rely on is the sun, and that another bet will be made.

Of course there are times...

I see a woman out the corner of my eye, the way the light glints off her hair, the way she laughs or shrugs and without thinking I go after her because I have to know, I have to. And when she turns - because I got too close and scared her - when I see it isn't her, I need a drink or two to calm me down. But then the next day I'm alright again.

One night I go upstairs and find Duke hunching over something in our office, which doubles as the Lost and Found. Sometimes when people win big at the tables they leave things behind in the rush to cash out.

Looks like a tablet this time. New, pricy model.

I ask Duke if he should be playing with it.

He shakes his head without looking up.

Jonah, this guy was into all manner of stuff.

I stop to look over his shoulder.

He's scrolling through a row of pictures: Girls, teenagers mostly, some in flimsy tops, some bare breasted, tied up, leaning on walls or propped against beds. Looking seductive.

Pretty tame stuff considering what you can find out there, except the atmosphere is weird. All faded and blurred, as if taken with a cheap camera or through a rainy window. It makes the poses seem sleazier somehow.

One picture bothers me especially and at first I don't know why. I ask Duke to flip back to it. The girl in that one is looking at the floor. Her arms are wrapped around her chest as if she's cold, her lips are pursed slightly. I realize I've seen that look before.

Years ago, late in the night, I woke up in my

mother's house and saw her arguing with Darcy in the kitchen. Or rather it was my mother who shouted, Darcy just stood there, lips pursed, hugging herself like the girl in the picture.

This girl seems a little younger than Darcy would be, and her hair is different. But that could be the light, or a wig.

You can play 'em too.

Duke taps the image.

The girl comes to life, takes a step in her stockings and heels and sits down on the bed. The old motel type with chintz bedspread. The camera moves closer, closer still as she twirls her hair, and then as if I'd willed her to -

As if she could hear my voice -

She looks up. Looks me in the eye.

It's Darcy.