

PERSONAL DEMONS

Written by

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INT. ADEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

It's the next morning, and Aden eats a bagel with cream cheese, his Ipad rests in front of him.

He flicks to a site, looks at the news heading, it reads: "David Hunter sits down with elusive right-wing gun-nut Curt Strongbow: exclusive interview." Aden scrolls through the tabloid-styled article, livid.

ADEN (V.O.)

In a world where everyone's opinions are doled out daily, the only way to stand out anymore is with old-fashioned sensationalism. Buzz-words grab a hold of the zeitgeist's waning attention spans.

Angered, Aden flicks to the blank page of a word document, the cursor flashing before him: But he can't write a word.

He hears a commotion outside: a loud BEEPING SOUND. Curiosity gets the better of him, and Aden leaves the kitchen table to investigate.

EXT. LOCUST AVE - DAY

Aden sees a moving truck backing out of the driveway of the house across the street. Gathered in front of the house are his neighbors OWEN COBB (35) and TINA FREEMAN (45), Leslie's also here.

Tina is Skyler's mother, she's dressed in a smart looking pant-suit. Owen has long curly hair, wears flip flops and leans on his recycling bin.

They are all gathered around NATALIE VERMAN (30). Natalie has a jaunty smile, she wears a bright sun dress as she chats with Leslie. Aden casually approaches Owen.

ADEN

What's going on?

Owen discreetly leans over to Aden.

OWEN

She's Seth Verman's wife, they just moved in.

But before Aden can ask anything more, Natalie comes over.

NATALIE

Hi. Natalie Verman.

ADEN

Aden Weaver. Nice to meet you.

The new neighbors shake hands, Leslie steps in.

LESLIE

Natalie was just saying that she would appreciate discretion in disclosing their whereabouts.

OWEN

Of course. That was horrible what happened to Seth, I saw that documentary.

ADEN

Forgive my ignorance, but isn't Seth Verman in prison?

OWEN

He was just released, didn't you hear?

TINA

What was he in for?

OWEN

Oh, you don't know? It was horrible, they railroaded him for a double count of murder with no evidence.

Aden and Tina exchange a quick, dubious, glance.

NATALIE

And it's been a marathon to get to this moment. We've been dreaming of it for a long time.

Aden puts on a big smile for his new neighbor.

ADEN

Well, where is he?

NATALIE

He's resting, this is only his second night out and he's adjusting I'm sure he'll feel more comfortable soon.

OWEN

Of course, and you should relax too. We're here when you need us.

NATALIE

I am totally burned out, thank you
for understanding.

Owen pats his hand on her shoulder.

OWEN

Very nice to meet you.

NATALIE

Same to you.

LESLIE

Be seeing you around, I guess.

The new neighbors all smile to one another, then scatter.
Owen wheels his recycling bin back beside Aden and Leslie.

OWEN

Shit man! We have a celebrity
living in the neighborhood.

Aden slightly breaks his stride.

Leslie and Owen continue down the street, but a momentary
feeling of unease comes over Aden, and he turns around and
stares at the house across the street. The leaves rustle in
the wind.

INT. SETH VERMAN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Seth Verman peers out a window, watching his neighbors clear
away. He's disarming: like he couldn't hurt a fly.

SETH (V.O.)

Making a late entrance was a good
call, that'll give 'em time to chew
on it.

Seth turns from the window and sits in an armchair, unpacked
boxes surround him. We push close on Seth, thinking;

SETH (V.O.)

Never forget: the world labelled
you a killer. It's gonna take charm
to win them over.

INT. ADEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Aden types in "Seth Verman" into Google on his Ipad. We see a picture of his pretty face, followed by some photos of the crime he was accused of committing: two boys, hung from a tree, gutted, and ignited in a roaring fire.

Aden cringes. He CLICKS a link that reads: "Seth Verman Interview."

SETH (ON IPAD)

When you're on death row, everyday
you wake up and think, what's the
worst thing they can do? Kill me?

Aden jolts back when he realizes Leslie is right behind him, leaning over, rapt by the interview.

LESLIE

Sorry, sorry.

ADEN

Fuck.

LESLIE

That's so horrible. Can you imagine
being locked away for that long?

Aden scrolls through some more sites, barely hearing Leslie.

ADEN

Hmm. Yeah.

LESLIE

What are you thinking?

ADEN

Nothing. Seth's case is...
interesting.

Leslie leans back, crosses her arms.

LESLIE

That's not it, is it?

ADEN

(guarded)

I don't know, don't you find it
weird how everyone's so quick to
believe whatever version of a story
is pushed on them?

LESLIE

I see.

ADEN

What's that supposed to mean?

LESLIE

It's just... Whatever, do what you want.

Aden swivels around with a smirk.

ADEN

Say it.

LESLIE

Aden, nothing seems to rub you the wrong way more than people agreeing on something.

ADEN

It's not that. Les, it's... this story moved in across the street. I'm curious, maybe it's something to write about.

LESLIE

Seth's case is very popular. You're not gonna add anything to the discussion.

ADEN

I've got tons of slants.

LESLIE

No, you have an overly active imagination.

ADEN

I'd hope so.

LESLIE

Just... don't be fooled by a sheep in wolves clothing.

ADEN

(laughing it off)

First, that doesn't make any sense. And second, I'm just taking an interest in our new neighbor.

Aden swivels back, clicks play on Seth's interview.

SETH (ON IPAD)

I don't have anything to lose in my situation, the only thing that keeps me going is knowing I didn't kill those boys.

Aden rubs his chin in deep thought.

INT. SETH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Natalie places an Ipad before Seth on a coffee table.

NATALIE

This was sent from Texas with a 1,000 dollar credit for Kindle. The note says: "For Seth, to buy all the books he couldn't read in jail."

She writes herself a reminder note.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

We'll have to send him a thank you e-mail.

Seth stares down to the Ipad, looking at it with a sense of wonder. Natalie sits down beside him.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Now, don't be embarrassed, but I'm going to give you a little lesson.

SETH

I'm not embarrassed, Nat.

Natalie proudly smiles to Seth.

NATALIE

So first, you flip it over and this button turns it on...

We push close to Seth as Natalie's voice FADES AWAY.

SETH (V.O.)

I can hear the neighbors clicking away, reading about me on the internet: a dash of excitement in their lives.

Natalie clicks to the KINDLE APP.

NATALIE

This is Kindle, pretty simple, just type in what book you want, and hit "search" or just click "enter."

Natalie slides the Ipad over to Seth.

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Now you try.

Seth picks up the Ipad, opens up the Kindle, types in: "Catcher in the Rye." The results pop up.

SETH

Pretty easy.

Natalie smiles, enchanted.

NATALIE

Baby, I think you're gonna do just fine.

She softly kisses him on the forehead.

INT. OWEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

All the neighbors are assembled at Owen's house. Aden, Leslie, Tina and Wendy sit watching the documentary instrumental in freeing Seth from jail.

RHETT GOODWIN (45), Wendy's husband is here. Rhett is wearing his drab teachers uniform: a sweater vest and some khakis.

As the news report plays, we move into the television, where we see CEDRIC AMERICA (45), the chubby documentarian who interviews Seth.

CEDRIC (ON TV)

If you could deliver a message to everyone out there, what would it be?

The camera SNAP ZOOMS into Seth.

SETH (ON TV)

I would say that it's up to us, as a nation, to change the system, it starts with all of us, these are the principles our country was built on. Hang on to that, cherish it. That's what keeps us going.

We move around the room, past a misty-eyed Owen, moving across Tina. We land on Aden, who isn't watching the interview, but is instead eyeing his neighbors' reactions.

All at once, Wendy flashes Aden a smile, he looks away. Wendy, in an act of defiance, grabs Rhett's hand.

Aden's had enough, he leans over to Leslie.

ADEN
I'm gonna have a smoke.

Aden gets up. Owen shuffles.

OWEN
Want us to pause it for you?

Aden slightly turns back.

ADEN
I watched it today.

EXT. OWEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Aden takes his dwindling first cigarette and uses it to light a second. He hears his neighbors talking inside.

He leans on the porch rail and looks across the street to Seth's house, he sees the lights turning off. Then, from over his shoulder...

TINA (O.S.)
Lordy, what a story.

Aden turns around to see Tina.

ADEN
Yeah, really interesting.
(probing)
What'd you think?

TINA
What do you mean?

ADEN
C'mon, I saw the look in your eyes
when you heard "murder", you were
worried.

Tina brushes Aden's smoke away, leans in close to him.

TINA

I don't trust most things, it's in my genes. Seen too many people put in jail just because. That's what my Dad used to say: It was never a "just cause", it was always "just because." And I'll tell you, with Seth, it's the same damn thing.

ADEN

So you're sold?

A CREAK, as Aden and Tina turn around and see Seth coming up the walkway, Natalie follows holding a wine bottle.

SETH

Hi.

The CICADAS HUM for awhile. Nobody does anything until Tina steps in Seth's direction and extends a hand.

TINA

Tina Freeman. I just watched the documentary. Seth, I have to tell you, I was so touched by your story.

SETH

Thank you.

Natalie comes up the walkway, gestures to the entrance.

NATALIE

Shall we go inside and meet everyone?

Seth hesitates, eyeing Aden.

SETH

I think I'll have a smoke first.
(he turns to Aden)
If you wouldn't mind lending me one?

ADEN

Of course.

NATALIE

OK. We'll see you boys inside.

The girls walk off.

Aden takes out his PACK, hands Seth a single smoke.

ADEN
That's a Camel Crush.

SETH
I know. I didn't miss much in the
wonderful world of smoking.

Aden smiles and extends his hand.

ADEN
Aden Weaver.

SETH
Seth Verman.

ADEN
Yeah. I feel I know you already
from the nightly news.

SETH
I hope that's a good thing.

Aden takes out his zippo and lights Seth's cigarette for him.
Everything slows and we push into Aden staring at the flame.

ADEN (V.O.)
Does the fire remind you of boiling
flesh?

A loud POP as Seth crushes his smoke.

ADEN
So, how's it feel?

SETH
To be out?

ADEN
Yeah.

SETH
It's a big adjustment, thinking
about fitting in... When you're on
death row, you wake up and only
think: what's the worst they can
do? Kill you? Now I'm worrying
about what people think about me.
It's pretty crazy, really.

ADEN
Strange, deja vu.

SETH
What?

ADEN

It's nothing, I'm sorry, I'm a writer, so I pick up on word choices, things like that, and I saw in one of your interviews you saying that about death row before.

Seth sizes Aden up, then...

SETH

Oh, well it's like...
(he grasps for his explanation)

You've probably never done interviews before, but there seems to be an endless amount of ways they can ask the same question but only a few ways to answer. Natalie said to treat it like political canvassing.

(making light of it)
Gotta remain steadfast, you know?

ADEN

(kindly)
Well, you got off. You don't need to campaign anymore.

SETH

It's gonna take me awhile to adjust. So, you write?

ADEN

I do.

SETH

That's interesting.

ADEN

Yeah, well, only to me.

SETH

No, for me too, we have something in common.

ADEN

What's that?

SETH

I wrote my memoir in jail.

ADEN

Good for you.

Seth shrinks back, dissed, but hiding behind a smile.

ADEN (CONT'D)

When I started, I was really just learning, now I'm more interested in...

Aden's voice FADES AWAY as we move closer to Seth: On the surface he's pretending to listen to Aden, but inside...

SETH (V.O.)

I remember hoards of people screaming at me from behind police barricades. No one yells anymore. I almost prefer it to this quiet hatred, buried under a snide comment. Back then, at least you knew where you stood.

Seth snaps out of it as Aden asks...

ADEN

- Have you had any publication offers?

SETH

Well, Johnny Lane wants to option it.

ADEN

The actor?

SETH

Yeah. He's pretty popular, right?

ADEN

Johnny Lane's every teenage girls wet dream.

Seth butts out his smoke, smirking to Aden.

SETH

That's funny.

ADEN

What?

SETH

You just seem like someone who doesn't... sugarcoat things.
(he steps closer)
You know, I'd like to get a fellow writer's feedback on my memoir.
Would you like to read it sometime?

ADEN

Yeah, I think I can fit it in.

Seth strolls towards the front door.

SETH

Great. Well, let's not keep them waiting.