

Strangers in the night

by  
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FADE IN:

INT. - BUS STATION - NIGHT

Fluorescent lights beat down on CHRIS MARQUEZ, a 20 something GI Joe look alike, he threads his way between a bank of ugly pleather chairs.

Slowly he makes his way to a reader board, DEPARTURES displayed prominently on the top.

His head drops as he glances at his wristwatch.

The LED reads 8:20 PM.

The date... 9/11

He scans the board.

NASHVILLE 8:40 Bay Four

CHRIS  
20 minutes, enough time for pie!

INT. - BUS STATION RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Chris steps through the glass doors into what would be a retro 50's version of a diner, if only... it had ever been remodelled.

No such luck, judging from the worn spots on the counter top.

The clink of forks and knives hitting plates washes over him as he scans the small room for an open table...

Nothing. Guess it's the counter, then.

Halfway down the length of it, sits SANDY FLETCHER, early 20's, sporting shaggy hair and a few days growth of beard.

All that hair does nothing to make him look like a tough guy.

He just looks worn out and grungy.

At Sandy's feet sits a beat up black garbage bag. Leaning against it, a piece of wood siding, with peeled up paint and slightly warped, it looks almost as worn out as its owner.

Chris slings his duffel bag down and takes a seat two stools away from Sandy.

They exchange nods.

Sandy glances at the duffel, reads SGT. MARQUEZ stenciled onto it's side and looks at Chris with interest.

SANDY  
Hey, you in the Army?

CHRIS  
Yeah. Got a problem with that?

SANDY  
Naw, man, no problem. Just wanted to ask you a question or two. See, I'm thinking of joining up.

CHRIS  
The Army?

SANDY  
Yeah, don't wanna be a Jarhead, and I'm sick of water. I'm staying on dry land.

CHRIS  
What'd ya wanna know?

SANDY  
Is Basic training as hard as it looks? I'm strong so I can do the running and jumping stuff, but damn, I don't want them guys screaming at me all day, every day.

CHRIS  
Relax, it's just the first couple weeks when they try to bust your balls. They're doing it to weed out the weak. It ain't personal.

Just then, the waitress arrives with an arm load of plates.

She deals them out in front of Sandy.

As soon as she sets down the first dish, Sandy grabs a fork and begins to dig in.

Chris watches in amazement as vast amounts of food disappear.

The waitress pours Chris a cuppa joe and jots down his order.

CHRIS  
Cherry pie, lots of whipped cream.

He goes back to staring at Sandy, still packing it in.

SANDY

Wha?

CHRIS

I never seen a guy your size eat so much. You eat like a linebacker.

Sandy wipes his mouth with his sleeve and gives up a slightly sheepish grin.

SANDY

Sorry. First hot meal I've had in a couple weeks.

CHRIS

You one a them homeless dudes?

SANDY

I am now. I'm from New Orleans.

CHRIS

Oh man, I feel like such a jerk. I didn't know...

SANDY

Naw, man, it's cool. Let's just drop it. Where ya going?

CHRIS

Nashville, then Clarksville, KY. I gotta report for duty at Fort Campbell tomorrow.

SANDY

You assigned there?

CHRIS

Not yet. I'll be stationed there starting tomorrow. I'm still on leave right now.

SANDY

Oh yeah? Where was you stationed before?

CHRIS

Iraq.

SANDY

No shit.

CHRIS

Nope.

SANDY

Guess you could do with some water, huh?

They both chuckle uncomfortably at the "joke".

CHRIS

Yeah, just not as much as you guys had. Where you headed?

SANDY

Atlanta.

CHRIS

Why there? You could join up here, if you wanted.

SANDY

I sent my wife and kid up to her Momma's before the hurricane. I wanna hold my baby before I join up. Let my wife know that Daddy's still handling business.

The waitress brings Chris his pie and tops off his cup.

CHRIS

Mind if I ask you a question?

Chris digs into his pie.

Sandy slows down the shovelling, but not by much.

SANDY

Fair's fair...

CHRIS

That your suitcase?

SANDY

Yeah, my wife took the real one with her.

CHRIS

What's that board?

SANDY

My house.

CHRIS  
Your house?

SANDY  
What's left of it.

An uncomfortable silence engulfs them.

After a moment, Chris clears his throat and throws an awkward grin in Sandy's direction.

CHRIS  
I'm sorry to hear that, about what happened... but, if you can make it through that... Basic's a cakewalk.

SANDY  
Thanks, man, 'preciate that.

CHRIS  
You look like a smart guy. Want some advice?

SANDY  
Sure, but I ain't guaranteeing I'll follow it.

CHRIS  
Yeah, most free advice is worth what you pay for it.

SANDY  
Got that right. But, go ahead, tell me. What?

CHRIS  
Simple... don't let the recruiter sign you up for nothing that only the Army does.

SANDY  
Ya lost me--

CHRIS  
You wanna take care of your family, even when you get out, right? Get a good job...

SANDY  
Yeah. So?

CHRIS  
So... nobody hires a turret gunner,  
'cept the Army.

SANDY  
Wow, I never thought of it like  
that, thanks.

They both push away their plates, lean back and heave  
contented sighs.

CHRIS  
They don't got pie in the sandbox.

SANDY  
And there ain't no steak in the  
Astrodome.

They chuckle, happy to be out of their respective hells, they  
both take a thoughtful sip of their drinks.

ANNOUNCER  
First boarding call, Atlanta, Bay  
Three, 10 minutes.

Sandy twists around, looks for the waitress, he finally  
catches her eye and makes a check scribbling motion.

She holds up one finger in a "one sec" motion.

Sandy stands and digs through the pockets of his beat up  
jeans. A half eaten tube of antacids, a bus ticket, some  
coins and a crumpled 20 dollar bill are all he's got.

CHRIS  
Your wallet wash away?

SANDY  
Nah, ain't nothing in it but my  
license, so it's in there.

He motions towards the garbage bag.

SANDY  
Man, I wish she'd get here, I gotta  
go to the men's...

CHRIS  
Go ahead, I'll watch your stuff.

SANDY  
You sure?

CHRIS  
Yeah, it's no problem.

SANDY  
OK, give her this, tell her to keep  
the change, it won't be much...

CHRIS  
All right.

Sandy gets up and heads for the rear of the diner.

ANNOUNCER  
First boarding call, Nashville, Bay  
Four, 10 minutes.

The waitress drops off their checks and sweeps past him,  
behind the counter, on her way to the cash register.

Chris looks towards the back of the diner.

No Sandy in sight.

Other people head towards the register too, so he decides to  
hurry and join the line.

He scoops up the garbage bag and his duffel in one hand while  
he pushes the siding and the checks along the counter top.

Second in line, he gets to the cash register, hands her both  
checks and a bill to pay for them.

CHRIS  
Thanks, that was delicious.

WAITRESS  
I'll tell my husband you liked his  
pie. He'll be glad to hear it.

She counts out change and begins to hand it to him.

CHRIS  
Oh, wait, do me a favor and you can  
keep the change.

Chris glances towards the back one more time.

Still no Sandy.

He leans across the counter, whispering in her ear, he points  
at the garbage bag, then the board, then he motions towards  
the restrooms. Talking the whole time.



She nods, folds the change and puts it into her apron.

WAI TRESS  
OK, I will. Thank you.

She begins to process the next customer's check as Chris opens the garbage bag and rummages around inside it.

Sandy comes out of the bathroom just in time to see Chris close the garbage bag, grab his duffel and leave.

SANDY  
Hey!

Chris ignores the shout and keeps walking.

Sandy hurries towards his bag and the waitress.

SANDY  
Where's he going?

WAI TRESS  
He didn't tell me.

SANDY  
He take anything?

WAI TRESS  
I dunno, I didn't see him take nothing.

SANDY  
Where's my house?

WAI TRESS  
House?

Sandy see the piece of siding behind the counter and points at it.

SANDY  
There. That's it.

WAI TRESS  
That?

SANDY  
Yeah, gimme it.

She lays it on the counter as Sandy picks his bag up and digs frantically through it.

Finally, with a sigh of relief, he hauls out his wallet.

As he opens it, he tugs at his license and begins to wildly promise payment for his supper.

SANDY  
Listen, I don't got no more money,  
but I'll give you my driver's  
license and I swear I'll send--

WAITRESS  
You don't gotta send nothing. He  
paid for it.

SANDY  
He did?

WAITRESS  
Yeah, with a fifty, told me to keep  
the change too.

He glances down, opens his wallet to the money compartment and finds the crumpled twenty.

Puzzled, he looks at the waitress.

SANDY  
But--

WAITRESS  
He said to tell you-- it was his  
treat, from one soldier to another.

EXT. - BUS BAY - NIGHT

As he runs towards his bus he sees the lit up "Nashville" on the bus's marquee in the bay next to his.

He strains to see through the tinted windows... no luck...

He hustles around to the other side of the bus.

Quickly, he scans the windows on this side, until finally... there's Chris.

They lock eyes and nod at each other, again.

Slowly, Sandy brings his hand to his forehead and offers Chris a salute.

They exchange solemn smiles as Chris returns the honor...

FADE OUT.