

Chapter 6

Motoring. Top down, sun shining, heading north on I-95.

Destination: Simon's house.

"Hey dude, why do you always pick up me first, and then go get Simon?" Jimmy asked.

Well, shit. Questions. That was one of the side effects of being with other people and not telling them anything about what you're doing. Or why. For a brief moment I thought about just stopping the car and letting Jimmy off on the side of the road.

I know that would be mean, but . . . man. So tempting.

I decided to answer instead. Getting rid of Jimmy would make the ride much better, sure, but then I'd have to spend time alone with Simon.

So.

Lesser of two evils.

"It's because you're closer, that's all," I said. "I live in Orlando, you live in Daytona, and Simon lives in . . . where the hell does he live again?"

"Wilma & Fred," Jimmy answered.

"Wilmington, yeah. So that's all. It's just easier to pick you up first because you're closer. And it's not "always" either for crying out loud. This is only, like, the second time ever."

"Yeah, well. So why does Simon live so far away from us anyway?"

"I don't think he likes us a whole lot."

Jimmy thought about this for awhile. I watched the mile markers pass, hoping he wouldn't start talking again but knowing he would.

"So the more you don't like somebody the farther away from them you live?"

"Sometimes, yeah. Unless there are kids involved. Then you're pretty much screwed."

"Okay. Alright. That's cool," Jimmy said. "So he still likes us *some*, because he doesn't live *that* far away. I mean, if he *really* hated us, he'd move to California, right?"

"Only if he hated himself more."

"Or if he surfed."

"Or if he surfed," I agreed.

We cruised for a few minutes. Just warm air and white lines blowing by like time. Digging it.

"Hey dude," Jimmy said. "You don't have any snakes in the car do you?"

"Snakes? What are you talking about? Of course there's no snakes in the car. Where does that even come from?"

"I dunno. I just thought, you know, that there might be a snake under the seat."

"Why the hell would there be a snake under the seat?"

"I dunno, man. It's your car."

I sighed. Couldn't help it. I normally don't like sighing. Always thought it was kind of a girl thing; not something a tough guy would do. But I swear sometimes Jimmy can drive me crazy, and in those moments of temporary insanity there are occasions when it happens before I even realize it. Anyway, I figure since we were driving down the interstate probably no one saw me do it.

Of course, *you* know I did it because I just told you, so I guess you could tell somebody if you wanted to. If you were a snitch. Are you a snitch?

And how the hell are you even hanging out with me and Jimmy? We're in my car doing close to eighty miles an hour down the highway and you're like, what? Some disembodied voyeur just floating in space next to our car checking us out and listening to what we say?

What the hell, man?

I sighed. Again.

Obviously it's not just Jimmy getting on my last nerve. And no, it's not you either. Not really. I'm just a little touchy at the moment that's all. Happens when I have too much time to think. Like when I'm driving.

Look, I know the deal here. I know that *you* know what's going on, but what you need to know, if you don't already, is that *I* know what's going on too. So does Jimmy. And so does the soon to be introduced Simon. There might be some others too, but I don't think so. Just us three.

We're characters in a book. Figments of the author's imagination. We know that, okay? Usually it's no big deal. I mean, no situation is perfect; everybody's got problems to deal with, so most times it's not even something I think about.

But it's there, you know? It's always there. In the back of your mind, even when you're not thinking about it.

Kind of like when you replace the battery in your car and all the radio presets get wiped out and you don't remember how to set them and you're in traffic and don't want to get in a wreck so you tell yourself you'll figure it out later but then you don't and a day goes by and then two and then a week and then another and the next thing you know there's daylight savings time coming around and now you have to reset the clock too and you don't remember how to do that either and now it's the radio presets and the clock and you only ever think about it when you're actually driving and can't do anything about it or in the middle of the night when you wake up to pee and then get back in bed and think, "*Dammit I still haven't reset the radio buttons or the clock*" because of course, it makes perfect sense that *that* stupid shit would pop into your head at two o'clock in the morning and you can't do anything about it because who goes down and does something like that in the middle of the night - nobody, that's who - so you just lay in bed thinking about it all night and you can't get back to sleep until, like, an hour before you have to get up anyway and then you're so tired you completely forget about it again.

Like that.

So I probably should have told you sooner, because this is like Chapter 6, but I just figured that you probably read the first Clash of the Figments in which case you'd already know it. But then I thought, man if they don't know then this could be some real confusing shit. But since the first 5 chapters have already happened, I couldn't just go back and insert it in there somewhere, so Chapter 6 it is.

Anyway, that's what I was talking about with Trina at the very beginning, so if part of that conversation didn't make any sense to you, maybe now it does.

I don't think Trina knows she's in a book, though. I thought about asking her, but if she doesn't know already asking her would probably tip her off, and I think it she'd be better off not knowing. It can be a little disorienting, to say the least.

"Are you going to keep talking to them and ignoring me just because I asked if you had any snakes in the car?" Jimmy asked.

"I'm not ignoring - "

"Because it's a perfectly legitimate question, you know. I saw 'Snakes on a Plane'."

Legitimate? Where did he learn *that* word?

"Yeah, you and seven other people," I said.

"What can I say? I run with a small but eclectic crowd."

Eclectic? WTF?

"And if you're ever on a plane," he continued, "I'm telling you dude, you do *not* want a bunch of snakes on there with you."

"Jimmy, you've never been on a plane in your life."

"Slithering all around of the floor."

"Why is this conversation even happening?" I asked.

"Cobras and shit. Nope. Ain't happening."

"My solemn oath, Jimmy - there are no snakes in my car."

He looked at me skeptically, apparently mulling it over.

"Spiders?"

"Not a damn one. Promise."

"Cool."

We drove on awhile in contemplative silence. Me, trying to come to terms with everything that had happened today. Jimmy, well, who the hell knows what's going on in his head?

But back to me; what the hell was up with Jimmy? All the changes going on at his house, the whole "band getting back together" thing, and now the sudden additions to his vocabulary . . . I'm absolutely serious; the fact that I'm even using the words "Jimmy" and "vocabulary" in the same sentence is blowing my fucking mind. It's the kind of thing that can get you thrown into prison in some third-world countries. Well, maybe not thrown into prison, per se, but it would definitely get people looking at you weird, which is the first step on the short road to a life behind bars.

At least I think it is. Probably. What the hell am I, a lawyer?

"I'm not a lawyer, am I?" I asked.

"I don't think so," Jimmy said. "You know too much about reptiles to be an attorney."

"Right."

"Plus, you don't use that 'esquire' thing after your name."

"You're right; I don't. I think that pretty much nails it."

"Of course, Bill S. Preston used it and he wasn't an attorney."

"Who?"

"Bill S. Preston, Esquire."

"Who the hell is Bill Preston?" I asked.

"Bill S. Preston," Jimmy said, stressing the apparent importance of the letter 's'. "You know, from 'Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure'."

As if that explained everything. Though, in Jimmy's case, things like that usually did. And I'll be perfectly honest with you - as opposed to the rest of the time when all bets are off - I felt some amount of normalcy creeping back into the day just hearing Jimmy explain part of his worldview with a Canoe Reeves movie.

“It’s Keanu,” Jimmy said.

“You know what?” I said. “I didn’t say a thing.”

“Yeah, but you were thinking it, dude.”

Jimmy sometimes had a bad habit of listening in on people’s thoughts. Like mine.

“I’ve warned you, Jimmy. Stay out - ”

“ - of your head,” he finished. “Yeah, I know, dude.”

I was trying to decide if I needed to pop him one upside the head, because, keeping with the whole honesty thing, it’s been a really long time since I punched somebody, and *that* certainly wasn’t normal (since we’re on the topic of normalcy), but before I even get my hand clenched into a fist Jimmy saw the blimp.

“Check it out, dude!” he said, all talk of snakes and attorneys - is there really a difference? - wiped from his mind. “A blimp!”

Ah, a blimp.

One of the problems with all of the technological advancement in the world is that there are fewer and fewer things these days that actually make people just stop and gaze in wide-eyed wonder. I’m talking the kind of ethereal magic that stops conversation, brings daily routine to an abrupt halt, and leaves all in witness with soft, impish smiles on their faces. Our minds have been so bombarded with images and information that what was once truly awe inspiring has become now, banal.

And what do we have left in the world that has eluded the grasp of indifference?

Well, I actually made a list:

A nice set of tits, a total eclipse of the sun, waves pounding endlessly onto the beach, the smell of a baby, the first bite of a perfectly cooked steak, a nice set of tits (I know I already said that, but hey, come on, we’re talking about boobs here; kingdoms have fallen), the roar of the crowd at Fenway when a ball clears the Green Monster, physically touching an animal that can kill you, and things that float in the sky in complete defiance of gravity.

Like blimps.

I slowed the Impala to a stop. Put it in Park. Leaned back into the leather seat and pushed the brim of my fedora up a notch. And there we sat; me & Jimmy, gazing up into the sky.

We didn’t talk.

We didn’t do anything.

We just stared and smiled.

You could hear the faint hum of the blimps motors. At least, you would have been able to hear them if it weren’t for all of the assholes behind us laying on their horns.