

Riding to Wisteria

The PCH woods were a peaceful respite from sun-baked streets and skyscraper-length traffic. I've never ridden this far, and it was as nice as I thought it'd be.

Tonight is our only stop on the way up: a seaside town called Bodega Bay that I haven't heard of. It seems like a good place to stop for the day because it's dark now and I woke up early and started later than I wanted to. It's a pretty place, like most of the towns along the coast. A few months ago, that probably would have been enough for me to set down my roots or whatever and find a way to stay here. The people seem friendly enough, maybe I could have snagged a job as a delivery-boy or something. But now I know I have to go further North.

Two lefts off the main road, a right, head straight up for about two blocks, then two more rights, and I'm there. Just gotta remember that. Mom always said the town would never change and I'm hoping that means Nana's address hasn't either. I'm also really hoping that I'm remembering the directions right... 10 years without a visit isn't conducive to an accurate memory but, hey, you only live once, right?

This diner is my last stop before I check into the motel. Hind is parked outside, the diner is playing Frank Sinatra, and the heat is on and much appreciated. The americana is not lost on me, but I kind of expected tha-

"So, what can I get you this fine evening?"

Jason's eyes rushed upwards to the young woman standing beside his table. She had a notepad and pen in her hand, with a black ponytail that lazed down her shoulder and seemed to point to the name-tag pinned to her uniform: Jess.

"Oh, um-" His hands fumbled his journal to the side and, with a quietly sincere desperation, attempted to grab a stubbornly flat laminated menu. His cheeks were warming a bit, too.

The edges of her lips curved up easily. "I didn't mean to catch you by surprise, but I thought you could use a break from all the writing."

"Right, yeah, that makes sense- thanks." His attempt at a smooth smile was clearly tainted with surprise.

"Mind if I ask what you're writing?" Her arms lowered a bit so that the notepad and pen weren't dividing them. "Hopefully not something about the American condition or whatever, right? Would be kind of, you know," Her arms gently waved at the walls around them- the juke-box, red furnishings, metallic accents. Jason's lips thinned slightly as he glanced around.

"Oh, yeah- no, no, just my thoughts, I think."

"You think?" Her smile grew a bit. He started to smile back, more easily this time.

“Yeah, pretty sure it’s just my thoughts. I haven’t had a chance to look at the menu yet, sorry.”

“It’s okay, don’t worry about it. Not like we’re busy.” Jess turned her head slightly to the empty booths around them. Jason took note of the bored-looking cook leaning out the serving window. Jess was right- the fact that he’d nearly started writing about the American experience in a place like this made him want to chuck his journal in their deep fryer. Maybe his pencil, too. Jess turned back to him, and her smile had faded to something more reserved. Jason could have sworn she looked a little sheepish. “Hey, do you mind if I sit? I’ve still got a couple hours on this shift and I don’t really feel like pretending I’m busy.”

“Be my guest.”

Her smile returned, and it was brighter this time. Jason smiled, too, and thought about how easy it’d be to hang around the town for a while.