

REFLECTIONS

By Jeff Dunne

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jeff@bearcreations.org

CHARACTERS

OLD MAN

An old man with something important to say to Zaine.

ZAINE

A young man who has recently been turned down for a date.

SETTING

A park bench.

SCENE

(Zaine, a young man, is sitting on a park bench and watching the birds. After a few moments, a much older man walks up and considers where Zaine is sitting.)

OLD MAN

Thought I'd find you here.

ZAINE

Sorry? Do I know you.

OLD MAN

No. Would you mind scooting over?

ZAINE

Actually, a little. Yeah.

OLD MAN

You'll feel better about yourself in the long run if you scoot over and let *me* sit there.

ZAINE

I will?

OLD MAN

Definitely.

ZAINE

This is... it's kind of my spot. I sit here every Saturday morning about—

OLD MAN

I know. But trust me. This time is different, and a little scoot to the south will make you feel better.

(Zaine looks at him dubiously.)

Just move. You'll see.

(Zaine finally gives in and shifts to the other side of the bench. The old man sits down while saying...)

See? You feel better already.

I really don't.

ZAINE

Trust me. You do.

OLD MAN

(Zaine just looks at him. After a long pause...)

Well?

ZAINE

What?

OLD MAN

I thought it might help to talk about it.

ZAINE

About... what?

OLD MAN

You know.

ZAINE

Do I know you?

OLD MAN

I think we've covered that already. No.

(Another pause.)

But I know you.

ZAINE

You do.

OLD MAN

Oh yeah.

ZAINE

How, exactly?

OLD MAN

Ehh. I've been watching you.

You've been...

ZAINE

In a manner of speaking.

OLD MAN

And you think...

ZAINE

That I know what you're going through? Definitely.

OLD MAN

And do you know that I—

ZAINE

That you're feeling a little creeped out right now? Yeah. I know that too.

OLD MAN

When you say that you've been watching me, do you mean like...

ZAINE

With a pair of binoculars from across the street?

OLD MAN

Yeah.

ZAINE

Nah. Not quite like that. More studying than watching. Analyzing.

OLD MAN

Who the hell are you again?

ZAINE

You really don't recognize me?

OLD MAN

No.

ZAINE

Huh. Well, I guess that was too much to hope for. So, anyway... Want to talk about anything?

OLD MAN

No.

ZAINE

OLD MAN

It might make you feel better.

ZAINE

I doubt it.

OLD MAN

Try it. (*Pause.*) Okay. I'll start. Do you have any actual evidence that Elena doesn't like you—

(*Zaine jumps up.*)

ZAINE

What the fuck!?

OLD MAN

Sit down. What are you getting so excited for?

ZAINE

How the hell—

OLD MAN

I told you. Besides, you wear your heart on your sleeve so proudly it's amazing you haven't bled out completely.

ZAINE

(*Bitterly...*)

Who says I haven't?

OLD MAN

Sit. *Sit.* This is really awkward talking to you like this.

(*Zaine sits.*)

So... back to the question: do you have any actual evidence that—

ZAINE

Yeah. Yes. I do.

OLD MAN

I don't think you do.

Who the fuck—

ZAINE

Getting to that. I've watched you moping on this bench for years.

OLD MAN

What the—

ZAINE

And I decided I really needed to say something. For my own peace of mind.

OLD MAN

For years?

ZAINE

You could say that.

OLD MAN

How many years?

ZAINE

Oh, about fifty.

OLD MAN

You've been watching me for fifty years.

ZAINE

Give or take.

OLD MAN

I'm twenty-seven.

ZAINE

So?

OLD MAN

You don't see anything wrong with the math?

ZAINE

Eh. You'll piece it together in a minute. Anyway, about Elena. What evidence?

OLD MAN

What?

ZAINE

OLD MAN

What... evidence... do you have that she doesn't like you?

ZAINE

I'm not doing this.

OLD MAN

You think that because she turned you down for a date—

ZAINE

What the fuck—

OLD MAN

I'm seriously getting really tired of going through that. Next time I'm smacking you on the head. *(Beat.)* There could be a million reasons she said no.

ZAINE

How do you know—

(The old man smacks him on the head.)

OLD MAN

A million reasons. Maybe she was distracted. Maybe she just lost a loved pet. Maybe she misheard you. Maybe—

ZAINE

Or maybe she doesn't want to go out with me.

OLD MAN

Maybe. Maybe that *is* it. Maybe you just aren't her type. Maybe she doesn't feel like she knows you well enough. Maybe maybe maybe, A million possibilities.

ZAINE

What's your point?

OLD MAN

My point is... that you're at crossroads. You have a choice right now as to where you go next. Now, you've taken a few steps down the dark and ugly, but what you don't quite get is... you're the one turning off the lights and painting little devil horns on all the trees.

ZAINE

That makes no sense.

OLD MAN

Yeah, I probably could have worded that better. The point is that you've taken one situation, one exchange, one piece of data... You took this one thing, extrapolated the worst possible situation, and are now working like a son-of-a-bitch to convince yourself that you know everything there is to know. And frankly I'm a little sick of it.

ZAINE

Look, it seems pretty clear cut to me. Boy asks girl out. Girl says no. This means girl doesn't like boy.

OLD MAN

No, it *might* mean that. Might. Perhaps. 'Perhaps' is the key word here. The fact is that you think you're looking at the actual situation, but you're not.

ZAINE

I'm n—

OLD MAN

No. You're not. Here's the thing about being young and stupid. You, Zaine, have your head up your ass. You think you are looking at the world around you, but all you're seeing is yourself. Reflections of yourself. You don't see the world, because you have no idea how to get out of your own head. So everything's a mirror to you. You look at Elena, and instead of putting yourself in her place... trying to understand what the world looks like to her... you just latch on to what *feels* most plausible in your mind.

ZAINE

Going with the most plausible explanation of something sounds like pretty good advice, if you ask me.

OLD MAN

First of all, I'm not asking you. You're an idiot. You're twenty-seven years stupid. And now I'm going to tell you why you should absolutely *not* go with what feels plausible to you. Are you ready?

ZAINE

And why should I listen to you?

OLD MAN

I'm getting to that. Alright. Reason number one. You don't think much of yourself.

ZAINE

And you're not helping with that.

OLD MAN

Shut up. You don't have a particularly good self-image, and so the most plausible explanation to you is going to be the one that matches up with that crappy self-denigrating attitude. Reason number two: you know... basically nothing. You never stop to think about what might be happening in someone else's world. You assume that the whole fucking universe revolves around you, responds because of the things you say and do. It never even occurs to you that in terms of the rest of the universe, most of it anyway, you're basically irrelevant. You're scenery. A bit actor playing a bit part. You're "man in green, sitting on bench." You don't even make an appearance in the credits. But you think that everything that happens is a result of your actions and your innermost nature. For someone with so much insecurity, you're really fucking full of yourself.

ZAINE

So your advice to the stranger who's feeling that no one in the world gives a damn about him is... to tell him how insignificant he is?

(The old man smacks him on the head.)

OLD MAN

Sorry. It's just that sometimes it pisses me off how dense you can be.

ZAINE

And that helped?

OLD MAN

Actually, yeah. But to your point, I'm not telling you that you're insignificant. I'm saying that you really have no idea where you are and are not significant. You don't know, because you never bother to find out. But there's a third reason why 'what feels plausible' is a crappy way to make decisions. Are you ready for it?

ZAINE

Are you going to slap me again?

OLD MAN

Maybe. We'll see how things go. Reason number three: expectations shape reality. Look. Maybe everything you believe is, in fact, what's really happening. It's not, but let's pretend it is. You internalizing that Elena doesn't like you makes you react to her like someone who's disliked. People sense that. They feed on it. You set up this negative resonance. You think she doesn't like you, and you make the situation worse.

ZAINE

I'm not *making* it anything. It is what it—

(The old man smacks him again.)

OLD MAN

Shut up. Now, suppose you react differently? Suppose you find some other explanation? Suddenly the world is open to other possibilities. Maybe she does like you. And even if she doesn't, think about it. You. Feel. Better. No self-loathing, just the possibility that the world is a brighter place than you fear. And as a result, Elena's gonna get a different vibe. Instead of a surly, bitter guy she declined, you're someone who brings a little bit of light into the world around him. Maybe... she even changes her mind.

(They face off in silence for a few beats.)

Kid, listen carefully. Your thoughts are the only thing that you can truly control, and your best way to influence the world around you. They make a difference. Don't throw them away because you're too scared or too lazy to take responsibility for them.

(Zaine just stares at the old man, unsure of what to say.)

Just think about it. Okay?

(The old man stands, a little awkward and stiff like he was sitting too long. Zaine stands with him.)

Thanks for letting me have my old spot on the bench. Always loved that seat. Good view.

ZAINE

Who...

OLD MAN

I think you know. Well, I gotta get going. My wife's waiting for me.

(He points off stage.)

ZAINE

Is that...

OLD MAN

Yeah. That's her. We found each other again. Missed out on a good fifteen years that we could have had if...

ZAINE

If?

OLD MAN

Yeah. If. It's like the other side of 'perhaps'.

(He flashes Zaine a smile.)

That'll make more sense in a few years.

(He starts to exit, walking a bit stiffly with age. Then he stops and turns around.)

Oh, and Zaine?

ZAINE

Yeah?

OLD MAN

Do me a favor, and start stretching more, okay?

(The old man exits.)

ZAINE

Sure.

(Lights out.)