

## The Note

I didn't know what I was waiting for. The note wasn't meant for me. I was just some schmuck who had to take a dump. Stopped by a McDonald's on my way to work, did my business, reached for the toilet paper and the note flew out as I spun the roll.

Blue booth. North Main. 10 pm tonight. Call 555-6785. Let it ring twice, hang up and wait.

I showed the note to my boss Larry. He was convinced it was left for or by a Soviet. Everyone's Russian in his mind. All the non-Russians are being bugged, followed, investigated by the KGB. And by all the non-Russians, I mean me and him, and I think he thinks I'm a spy. I'm a metal head working part-time at a record store in rural Pennsylvania for Christ's sakes.

"You need to lay off the shitty weed and CSPAN, Larry."

"Okay, Rick. If it's not the Russians, who is it?"

"I don't know - the Mob?"

"Come on, man. The Mob doesn't do business in rural Pennsylvania."

"Why don't you come with me?"

"I have plans."

"*St. Elsewhere* is not having plans, Larry."

"It's Thursday, not Wednesday. You see that Jake Ryan look alike flipping through the R&B cassettes?"

I nodded.

"A little too All-American looking, huh? And he showed up a couple minutes after your shift started. Coincidence, I think not."

I noticed Jake in the food court while on break. He sipped an Orange Julius and paged through today's paper. I studied him while my hotdog on a stick was being dipped and fried. I don't know if I caught Larry's paranoia but I could not classify this guy.

In the genus of *mallrat* there are the following species: stoners, gamers, geeks, Aqua Net girls, jocks, preppies, freaks. Anyone between the ages of 13 - 20 can be placed into one of these categories. If you have long hair, you're a stoner, even if you're not. Go to the arcade, gamer. Read comics, a geek. Any girl, Aqua Net. Asshole, jock. Came to the mall to actually buy clothes, prep. Listen to rock n' roll or appear poor, freak.

Under normal circumstances, I would be inclined to classify Jake as a prep; but three hours, no purchases, and not a wrinkle to be found on his khakis or plaid button down is unusual. I had no choice but to classify him as alien.

"Russian - absurd, but alien, plausible. Yeah. Mmmkay. What section was he reading?"

"He read the entire paper. Flipped fast. Some kind of speed reader, must be a super power."

"Dude, you're spaced. Ignore the note, man, it's getting to you."

"I can't. And now Jake Ryan's alien twin is following me. Totally weird. I'm doing it."

I arrived in the North Main lot at 9:52. A red Celica had tailed me from the mall and parked two rows behind me. I cranked *Ride the Lightning* and lit a Camel. The phone booth was across the street, unoccupied. I had one eye on the booth and the other on the rearview when Larry jumped in the passenger side.

"Jesus, man. Fuck. Thought you had plans."

"*Hill Street Blues*. Since when do you smoke?"

"Just started."

"Did you see the alien's behind you?"

"Figured as much."

"So if it's a call from the Mothership, you going?"

"I'm keeping all options open."

"You're a brave motherfucker, Rick. I had you wrong. Yeah, you live with your parents. Yeah, you have no ambition. Yeah, you'd have a better chance of getting laid if you got rid of that rattail. But man, you're fearless. Like Jed Eckert."

"He died, I won't."

I have no idea how old Larry is, if I had to guess, maybe mid-thirties. I do know that he's exactly who I do not want to be. He's scared of his own existence but too afraid to admit it. He's the Russian following himself.

"Larry, man, thanks for being you. And thanks for being here. You're the fearless one."

"Of course, man. Now some advice. If you hear any clicking on the line, you'll know the phone is bugged. Don't say your name or anything that can identify you. And, I'm sure you know this, but it's very likely that the booth is wired with explosives. Do as your directed. I'll take care of the alien."

"Alright, man. I'll be back."

I lit another Camel, threw the collar up on my jean jacket, gave a nod to the alien, and went in the booth.

I followed the note. Two minutes pass, three. I watch Larry get out of my car, walk towards the Celica and press his hands, that are now in the shape of a gun, to the driver side window. He gives me a quick thumbs up and gets back in position. Four minutes, five.

Bright lights barrel towards me. Two dudes throw a bag over my head and shove me into a van.

"Let's hear it."

"Hear what?"

"Say it man, come on."

"Um... come on?"

"What the fuck?"

"You said, say it man, come on. So, I said it. Come on."

"The fucking motto, man. I thought you were serious."

"Be prepared?"

"This isn't the fucking Scouts, Ryan. This is Pi Kappa Phi."

The bag is lifted.

"Who the fuck are you? Where's Ryan?"

"I'm Rick. And if you mean Jake Ryan's alien twin, he's in the North Main lot."

When we get back to the lot, Larry has Jake up against the Celica, arms and legs spread.

"Let our brother go, man!"

Larry backs off the alien.

The alien extends his hand, "I'm Ryan Jacobs. Sorry about all of this. I was to pledge tonight, the note was meant for me. I thought maybe you were in on it and I followed you out of McDonald's."

Larry's eyes got as big as saucers and he mouthed to me, "Ryan Jacobs. So weird."

I shook Ryan's hand, "Hope you know the motto, man."