

SON

Writer Number 19-DE07-W38

Joey, a 14-year old kid from the suburbs, is desperately searching for his homeless dad, but instead, he discovers his true identity with the help of a mysterious, half-crazy preacher who lives in a tent.

FADE IN:

EXT. BRIDGE UNDERPASS - LATE AFTERNOON

A gathering of tents in the shadows...dirty, ripped, worn.

JOEY is a skinny, dark-haired 14-year-old--a clean kid from the suburbs. Serious beyond his years.

He clutches a plastic bread bag with sandwiches inside. He scans the haphazard row of tents. Frowns.

He walks up to a two-colored tent--faded green and once-white.

A rusted bent-up bike leans against the gray concrete wall.

Nearby is a grocery cart, packed to the brim with bags and boxes, bound by a bungee cord.

Joey's face is confusion, frustration, torment. He sniffs. Tries his best to hold back tears

...and fails.

A deep baritone, God-like VOICE comes out of nowhere.

VOICE

You all right, Son?

Joey looks up. Around.

VOICE

You got yourself an allergy or somethin'?

Joey wipes a snotty nose with his sleeve.

JOEY

No.

VOICE

Well, somethin's wrong.

(beat)

Boy, you're talkin' to a tent!

JOEY

Yeah...

The tent flaps slap aside like saloon doors in an old Western movie.

And out pops BENJAMIN--a thin black man in his seventies--dressed in a three-piece dark gray suit and a red tie. Though a bit crumpled, the suit is still crisp.

Joey takes a step back. Benjamin sizes him up.

BENJAMIN

I ain't gonna bite you or nothin'.  
Unless it's a full moon.

He looks up into the sky. Eyeballs Joey. Winks.

BENJAMIN

Looks like you're safe.

Benjamin holds out his hand.

BENJAMIN

Hey, gotta smile now and then. Huh?

Joey keeps his hand to himself.

JOEY

My mother says homeless people are  
dirty.

BENJAMIN

Oh? Is that so?

Benjamin withdraws his hand.

JOEY

She says they don't have good  
hygiene. So they carry all kinds of  
"stuff." You know.

BENJAMIN

"Stuff."

JOEY

Yeah. She says I can be nice...  
at a distance.

BENJAMIN

(beat)

Name's Benjamin. But you can call  
me...Benjamin.

JOEY

Joey.

Benjamin grabs Joey's plastic bag of sandwiches. Joey is startled.

BENJAMIN  
Mighty obliged.

He shoves his hand into the bag. Fishes out a PB&J and eagerly stuffs it into his mouth.

JOEY  
That was..

Benjamin looks at him, his mouth full of peanut butter and white bread.

JOEY  
Never mind.

Benjamin looks in the bag. Swallows.

BENJAMIN  
You made these?

Joey nods.

Benjamin nods.

BENJAMIN  
(to himself)  
So...this must be my assignment.

JOEY  
Assignment?

BENJAMIN  
You never mind 'bout that. Welcome  
to my livin' room!

He gestures to a pair of white plastic lawn chairs--one has a busted-out back, the other has a broken-off leg propped up on a block of wood.

Joey hesitates.

Benjamin insists with a look.

Cautiously, Joey sits down. Benjamin reclines with a satisfied sigh.

BENJAMIN  
Why you here, Joey?

JOEY  
I'm lookin' for somebody.

BENJAMIN  
Your mother know you're here?

JOEY

She'd kill me. But she works three jobs, so I'm pretty much on my own. Got a friend who drives me around.

BENJAMIN

Who you lookin' for?

Joey looks Benjamin in the eye.

JOEY

My dad.

Benjamin's eyebrows raise.

JOEY

He was here yesterday.

Benjamin looks in the bag, fishes out another sandwich.

JOEY

Have you seen him?

BENJAMIN

White guy? Skinny like you, kinda tall, dark hair?

JOEY

Yeah!

BENJAMIN

Haven't seen him.

(beat)

Heard tell the cops came by. Y'know, seems they was a lot nicer when I was your age. But lately, they're startin' to crack down on folk.

(beat)

So what's the story with your dad?

Joey just looks at him.

BENJAMIN

How'd he wind up here, in this loveliness?

JOEY

Drugs.

BENJAMIN

Everybody's got their own ticket.

Joey gets up.

JOEY  
I gotta find him!

BENJAMIN  
How?

JOEY  
I...I don't know.

BENJAMIN  
You don't know?

JOEY  
Look at me. I'm just a stupid kid.

BENJAMIN  
One thing I know.

He looks at Joey. And through him.

BENJAMIN  
You ain't stupid.

As Benjamin leans forward, the sun lights up the rim of his gray hair from behind.

Joey looks at Benjamin, curious.

JOEY  
Are you an...?

Benjamin looks at him.

JOEY  
Never mind. I gotta go.

Benjamin watches Joey leave.

BENJAMIN  
(calling)  
Joey!

Joey looks over his shoulder. Benjamin holds up a sandwich.

BENJAMIN  
Thanks.

JOEY  
Yeah.

Joey turns back around. Breaks into a jog, then a run.

Benjamin watches him intently for a moment.

Then wolfs down his sandwich.

EXT. BRIDGE UNDERPASS - MORNING

We see Joey step into frame. He frowns.

JOEY'S POV

The underpass is swept clean. No sign that anyone was ever there.

We see Joey standing, clutching a new plastic bread bag filled with sandwiches. He holds for a moment, taking it in.

Then he runs off, racing off screen.

MONTAGE

Joey runs...

...down an alley, shafts of sun playing hide and peek between the buildings.

...past a row of beaten-down shacks squatting in squalor under a verdant canopy of ancient trees.

...across a vacant lot of discarded appliances, rusted-out cars, and wild yellow daisies echoing the sunshine, bending gently in the breeze.

INT. JAIL - AFTERNOON

Benjamin sits on the edge of a bed in his cell, his back to the bars.

He's garbed in orange, draped with a gray prison blanket to keep him warm.

From the hall, we hear someone approach the cell, panting.

Benjamin straightens up. Turns around to face the bars.

BENJAMIN

Joey?!

He stands to see Joey on the other side of the bars.

From a side angle, it's hard to tell who's inside prison and who's outside.

BENJAMIN

Son, how'd you wind up in prison?!

Joey holds the bars, looking incarcerated.

JOEY

I'm not the one in prison! And it's not a prison. It's a jail.

BENJAMIN

It's a prison. And we gotta get you outta here.

JOEY

I was lookin' for my dad. I asked the guard here--he's a friend.

BENJAMIN

You been lookin' for somebody 'sides your dad.

JOEY

I'm--

BENJAMIN

You got Jesus in you.

JOEY

What?

BENJAMIN

I can see Him in your eyes. Can't put a bushel on that kinda light.

Joey doesn't know what to say.

BENJAMIN

Let me tell you somethin'. You ain't just the son of a guy on the streets. You're the son of a Father who sits on a throne. A Father who loves you with everything he's got.

JOEY

I'm just a stupid kid.

BENJAMIN

Let me make somethin' clear. I'm the Preacher, you're the Congregation. So unless you got an "Amen" or a "Hallelujah", shut up. Got that?

Joey opens his mouth to say something--then stops.



BENJAMIN

Don't you dare tell me you're a stupid kid! That's a sacrilege! You know why? 'Cause you're sacred, Joey. When you got God wrappin' his lovin' arms around you, you are sacred! 'Cause you're his son!

Joey stares at him.

BENJAMIN

And whenever you say I'm not smart enough, or I'm not old enough, or I'm not rich enough, or I'm not strong enough, Father God says to you, I Am.

(beat)

Can I get an Amen?

JOEY

Amen?

BENJAMIN

(shouting)

Yes! Hallelujah!! God is your "I Am"!!

(starts with a hallowed whisper and builds)

The One who knew you before you was born, the One who created you in your Mama's womb, is callin' to you, Joey. Callin' you outta your fear, outta your doubt. Callin' you into somethin' great. Somethin' beyond you. Somethin' that's gonna take God. 'Cause that's the way he always sets us up.

He holds steady on Joey.

BENJAMIN

You been lookin'...all around, every place, searchin' every nook and cranny, lookin' for...?

JOEY

My dad.

BENJAMIN

No.

(beat)

You been lookin'...for yourself.

Joey doesn't get it.

BENJAMIN

And you're gonna find  
yourself...when you find God as  
your true Father.

(beat)

Ask me how I know.

(beat)

Well, time for the Benediction. But  
let me leave you with this. I  
believe God's gonna use you one day  
to talk to folk.

Joey doesn't believe it.

BENJAMIN

And I mean lotsa folk. I can see  
it!

JOEY

You can see it?

Benjamin puts his hand over his heart.

BENJAMIN

In here! You're gonna speak to 'em  
in such a way that turns their  
hearts to God. And he's gonna give  
you the very words to say.

(slaps his forehead)

Oh, dear Jesus!!

JOEY

What's wrong?

BENJAMIN

I almost forgot to take the  
offerin'!

JOEY

I don't have anything.

BENJAMIN

Oh, you got more than you know!  
'Cause you ain't just a "kid". What  
are you, Joey? You're a...

JOEY

I'm...a son.

BENJAMIN

(shouts)

Amen! Hallelujah!

(normal voice)

You're absolutely right!

(whisper)

You're his son.

JOEY

(beat)

I know where he is.

BENJAMIN

God?

JOEY

My dad.

BENJAMIN

You need to find him.

JOEY

Yeah...

(beat)

I also asked the guard about you.

BENJAMIN

Oh?

JOEY

He told me you were here. He could get in big trouble for all this. I gotta go.

BENJAMIN

Startin' this very day--and every day--you follow God's assignment for you. Wherever he tells you to go. And...no fear. Because you got your Father God with you. He's got your back. Always.

JOEY

(beat)

Goodbye.

Benjamin nods his head.

Joey looks at him for a moment. Breaks away and walks down the long hallway.

Joey stops. Sighs.

He calls back over his shoulder.

JOEY

Thank you...

He turns around. Alarm crosses his face.

JOEY

...Benjamin?!

Joey races back to Benjamin's cell. Grabs the bars and stares in shock.

The cell is empty. Joey looks down.

On the floor is the crumpled-up gray prison blanket.

Joey's eyes are wide with wonder.

We hold on the crumpled-up blanket.

We slowly look up and see Benjamin hiding in a corner of the cell, behind a partition, holding his hand over his mouth. He tries his best to hold back the laughter

...and fails.

Joey is confused.

Benjamin comes to the bars.

BENJAMIN

Dear Lord...you thought I was an angel?!

Joey just nods. Benjamin smiles.

BENJAMIN

Sorry. I just had to do that. Hey, gotta smile now and then. Huh?

Benjamin holds his smile, like an invitation.

BENJAMIN

Huh?

A beat. Joey snortles.

Benjamin breaks into a big smile. He looks into Joey's eyes. Holds.

BENJAMIN

Congratulations...Son.

Joey pauses a moment.

Joey reaches out his hand, through the bars.

Benjamin takes hold.

And they shake on it.

FADE TO BLACK.