

IN ENTIRE DOC:
Find any 6-spaces, 4-spaces, etc. + replace with 5-spaces! (Paragraph indents.)

Find " ? ! (Ending sentence followed by 2 spaces) + replace with 1 space!

CHAPTER 1

Along the coffee table, she lit the coffee-table collection of miniature candles, their light ^{washed} dispersing complete darkness from the ^{living} room.

"I just bought these today," said Jada Ferrari. ^{Brushing} As she brushed her hand above the flames, she inhaled the scent of jasmine ^{as it} that wafted through the air.

Jesse Barlow followed the curvature of Jada's figure as she leaned forward, her brunette hair falling in curls well past her shoulder blades. Tossing her lighter aside, she sat on the edge of the sofa. Always the center of attention, Jada was not alone: Cameron and Gabe, friends from an apartment downstairs, sat beside her, lighting the round of joints.

The scene, once common, had become less frequent in recent months. Jada, a burgeoning film producer's assistant, now preferred to keep company with people who could further her career.

Jesse's career, on the other hand, begged resuscitation.

From the recliner at the far end of the ^{living} room, Jesse, distant and disengaged, stared out the window at the crisp glow of a streetlight two stories below. The chirp of a car alarm being armed caught his attention. He leaned toward the sound in time to see a male silhouette emerge

from the shadows and wander into the apartment building next door.

An anonymous man. Los Angeles was filled with them. Then again, everyone is anonymous to someone. And everyone has an anonymous side, a shadow within, a guarded corner where secrets hide.

Gabe passed Jada her marijuana. She held her breath and savored the puff, coughed a few times, then fell back against the cushions and hung limber. She'd been craving this all day.

Cameron grinned. "Next time, you're buying."

Spoken like a low-level accountant.

Jada waved her joint in a hypnotic motion. "Jesse, are you gonna keep staring out the window or get in on the act?"

Years ago, he would have. Never an addict or ~~even a~~ heavy user, Jesse enjoyed a recreational hit every ~~few months~~ ^{so often} when the urge mounted within. But the pleasure had long passed. He was tired of breathing the strange air, the subtle loss of control.

He wished his guests would leave but knew it would be a few hours. Soon the music would start—Beck's Odelay, no doubt—followed by a raid on his refrigerator. Gabe and Cameron would argue whether "Loser" or "Where It's At" was the singer's ~~real~~ ^{real} breakthrough single.

Oh, what the hell. "All right, hand one over."

"There you go," Jada replied. "You never have fun anymore. Gotta live a little!" She turned to her couch mates. "Right, losers?"

Lightheaded, Gabe giggled.

Small stump in hand, Jesse sank again into the recliner, yielding to the sharp herbal fumes as they crept like a current ^{through his veins} and loosened his brain. The effect seemed immediate; his body was no

longer conditioned to the stuff. He focused on the array of candles, their light increasing in clarity and the jasmine growing richer.

Pensive, Gabe exhaled a deep cloud and leered at an ~~absent~~ⁱⁿ oblivion like a stoned Socrates. He waved the joint in front of his face, as if ~~it were an~~ⁱⁿ afterthought. "You know, those Rastafari guys say this stuff helps you get close to God."

God, thought Jesse. The God who never seemed to give him answers to a lifetime of questions. And ~~they~~^{the questions} resurfaced in a torrent.

Why did she have to die?

Why did I leave them behind?

Jesse leaned back further against the black leather cushion, clenching his jaw.

I'm a preacher's son, he thought.

So how did my life get so fucked up?

CHAPTER 2

The screech of an alarm clock pierced the 3:30 a.m. silence. Jada, groggy from the night before, groaned as she felt around the pre-dawn darkness for the button to make the ringing stop. ^{Not} ~~Never~~ one to hit the snooze button, she sat up in a heap as Jesse rolled over and mumbled.

“Is Barry scheduling sunrise meetings now?” Jesse asked.

Barry Richert. The Barry Richert, as Jada enjoyed reminding those who would listen. Barry Richert, whose unexpected success arrived two years ago with a low-budget film that became a sleeper hit, now received hundreds of screenplays ^a ~~each~~ week.

“A location shoot in Malibu. Call time is seven, but he needs me there an hour early.”

Their apartment was in Sherman Oaks, less than an hour’s commute, but Jada would spend much longer perfecting her image in the bathroom. And her head still pulsated from the ^{prior} ~~evening~~, before. ~~2~~

“Go back to sleep, babe.” She stroked his chest once and climbed out of bed. Jesse leaned on an elbow and admired her silhouette, clad in a slinky black negligée, as she tiptoed across the crowded bedroom and turned on the bathroom light.


Through the cracked door, Jesse heard the sputter of a shower. Then he buried his head in the pillow and dozed off. He had come to dread the sunrise ^{in recent months.} ~~over the last few weeks.~~

* * *

“A polarizing filter will help reduce glare,” Jesse explained. “Kind of like wearing a pair of shades at the beach.” From a display rack on the sales floor, he peered out the window while rattling off the benefits of camera filters to a newbie for the sixth time.

“What about this one?” asked the customer, grabbing a transparent red filter from the rack and holding it toward the overhead light. “It looks like half a pair of 3-D glasses.”

“More or less. It can be used to cover up skin blemishes. Heavy acne, that sort of thing,” Jesse said.

The customer chuckled, tucking a lock of silvering chestnut hair behind her ear. “That would come in handy for my daughter-in-law. The latest one, that is. Spent thousands on a new job but can’t get rid of that stuff along her neckline. Spends half her life in the tanning booth to cover it up. That reminds me:  can any of these filter things hide my son’s inheritance from her?”

“Sorry, ma’am.”

~~Lens Perfection~~ ^{Lens Perfection} ~~Ke Place all~~ ^{Ke Place all} sat on Ventura Boulevard near the Van Nuys intersection. Crammed within a dense stretch of bricked retail, the photography shop shared its walls with a Java Cup ^{coffee shop} and an incense ^{store} shop. Jesse found humor in the series of ^{looming} palm trees ^{looming} outside, whose lazy branches lapped ^{sunlight} the sun in strategic array but, in the end, sat unnoticed by passersby. With their perfect spacing, the trunks appeared victims of a transplant, carted to the side of a busy street to project an image of California perfection.

Even the trees were cosmetic.

Finishing up, Jesse led the customer to the cashier wrap with a handful of filters ^{he doubted she} she was ~~she was~~ ^{would ever use.} unlikely to use.

At 11:30, LensPerfect attracted a surge of foot traffic from those taking an early lunch hour. Most were browsers. A portrait studio sat toward the back and lured the occasional actor-to-be, who arrived with a designer coffee or vitamin water in hand, ready to schedule a shoot for the head shots that would make ~~them~~ ^{him} famous.

Jesse's head shots were free. After several years of part-time employment, the owner allowed the extra perk and arranged Jesse's schedule around his ^{bottom-rung} work on the film and television shoots. But the shoots had been sparse and, for two years straight, Jesse had not met the minimal hours required to secure medical coverage through the Screen Actors Guild. ~~But~~ ^{however,} at this point, ~~benefits~~ were the least of his concerns.

He felt ^a his cell phone's vibration in his pocket. When he flipped ^{his cell} the phone open and discovered a new text message from Maddy, his agent, his hopes surged. She had gotten word of a possible audition, a small supporting role in a feature film, and had been working on the lead ^{Prospect} for weeks. Although it consisted of ^{five} ~~four~~ lines, it represented an opportunity to expand his resume and connect with its director and principals. ^{Jesse} He needed the gig.

And the audition was scheduled.

Emotional attachments are dangerous; better to take the news in stride, but this audition could ^{mark the official} officially end his dry spell and justify years of waiting in LA. ^{of}

Jesse returned his attention to the store and the hum of its electric doorbell. A customer entered, around forty years old, and hung his sunglasses on his shirt opening. Dressed in starched khakis and a perfect haircut, the man looked more like a mid-level executive stopping by on his

way to a round of golf. Jesse wondered what a corporate job with steady hours must be like.

“Can I help you?”

“I tossed a roll of film in the drop-off bin yesterday.”

Jesse reached for the basket of completed photo packets on the rear counter. “Name?”

“Glen Sean Jander,” he replied.

As Jesse flipped through packets, Sean fingered through some eight-by-tens stacked beside the cash register. ^{When returned, he} Jesse found Sean examining a photo of a homeless man leaning against a railing at the Santa Monica Pier ~~in broad daylight~~, gazing into the ocean. The homeless man’s countenance communicated struggle between contentment and forlornness. ^{with his} ~~A~~ fishing rod extended in search of a victim.

Jesse ~~returned~~ ^{and} began ringing out the order.

Sean nodded at Jesse and said, “This is interesting, the guy’s expression. The photographer captured his, what? His ^{OK!} aura?”

“Oh, it’s not a professional photo.” Jesse chuckled. “It’s just a sample photo to illustrate the paper quality.”

“Do you know who took the picture?”

Jesse shoved a hand into his pocket. “I did.” Sean’s eyebrows rose a bit. ~~Jesse continued,~~ ^{Jesse continued.} “I’ve seen that man at the Pier from time to time. ~~Guy’s~~ ^{the} name is Marshall. He must catch dinner there. Life on the beach, huh?”

~~Smirking, Sean asked,~~ ^{photography} “Did you take ~~classes~~?”

“A high school class way back, but nothing else. I dabble in it here and there, flipping through books to pick up tips. Trust me, I’m no professional.”

REPLACE ALL: change all "Sean" to "Glen"!

“That’s amazing.” Sean glanced at the photo again, this time holding it up to the light. He extended his hand. “What’s your name?”

“Jesse. Nice to meet you.”

As they shook hands, Sean reached for his wallet and removed a business card.

“Tell you what, Jesse. My kid’s got a birthday coming up. We’re giving him a little party in a couple of weeks at a park nearby. Would you be interested in taking some action shots?”

“You’re making a professional out of me, is that it?”

Sean nodded.

“Sure,” Jesse said. “Who couldn’t use the extra cash?”

If only film jobs were this easy to obtain.

“Great! We’ll figure out the details later. Number’s on the card.”

As the customer walked away, Jesse peered down at the business card. Was it possible Sean might work in the legal department at a studio?

No such luck. Sean was ~~the~~ ^{a franchise owner in a fast-food chain.} owner of a collection of fast-food restaurant.