

SUNGLEAMED

Written by

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EXT: HIGHWAY IN THE GLEAMING PALOUSE WHEAT FIELDS - DAY

CAROMINE drives toward a rural Idaho town, cutting fast across the desolate road in high summer.

INT: CAROMINE'S CAR - DAY

Inside the car sits CAROMINE, a clean cut city queer: tucked in shirt, cuffed jeans, rose gold piercings, ratty mid-length hair. They pull into town and stop at a stoplight, craning their neck to take everything in. The world is different out here, low buildings, hulking trucks, a bulky bearded man in a red ball cap at a crosswalk. He's caught them staring and makes fierce eye contact, petrifying CAROMINE. The light turns green and a car behind CAROMINE honks, startling their foot onto the pedal.

EXT: CAROMINE'S NEW HOUSE - DAY

CAROMINE pulls their dinky Honda Civic up against the sidewalk in front of their new living situation, a sagging little house with peeling paint so sun-bleached it's gone from mauve to beige. The car is full to bursting with all of their worldly possessions. CAROMINE steps out of the car and up to the door, fumbling with the keys and finally gaining access.

INT: CAROMINE'S NEW HOUSE - DAY

It's even more drab inside. CAROMINE explores. The mid-sized living room's wooden floorboards are peeling up, illuminated by the sun streaming in through the picture window. The carpet in the musty bedroom is stained. The ceiling in the cramped bathroom slopes down over the shower.

INT: KITCHEN - DAY

The cupboards are all a heavily faded baby blue and there's barely any counter space. The sink looks ancient, at least a few decades old. CAROMINE gives the water a crank, hoping for refreshment. They lean down to take a sip, but recoil from the dank sulfur smell. They let the water run, hoping to clear out the pipes, but notice the stopper is closed. They push on the plunger but it won't budge. They put their whole weight on it and it suddenly gives way with a loud jarring crunch and the clank of metal falling. Peering into the cobwebbed cupboard under the sink, CAROMINE fishes out the broken part and brings it into the light.

They sink to the ground, sitting against the cupboard and holding the twisted little piece of rusted metal, unrecognizable. They sigh, nervously pulling out their phone to call the landlord.

CAROMINE

Uhhh, hi yes this is Caromine, the new tenant. I think my sink is broken...

LANDLORD (MUFFLED)

Ok, we'll send over the handyman right away!

CAROMINE sets the phone down and looks around at the barren house again from the floor. They stand up and resignedly cross to the living room window, gazing out at their parked car, full of stuff. Again, they look around at the empty room, then at their phone, then the car, then the phone again, then the car, and they head back out the front door.

EXT: DRIVEWAY - DAY

CAROMINE pauses a moment, sizing up the car. They take a deep breath, then let loose a sigh that morphs into a resolve that pulls them toward the trunk. Cracking it, they have to hold everything from falling out. They manage an armful of loose clothes and bedding and walk it up the steps. Another armful of clothes. A heavy box of books. A bookshelf. They fumble on the steps. They look around nervously to the neighbors' windows and the surrounding sidewalks, but there isn't anyone out.

They struggle with the straps holding their mattress on the roof of the car. They balance it, teetering, on their back. Their shirt comes untucked and they frantically check the sidewalks again. They hastily stuff their shirt in their pants and squeeze the mattress through the front door. They unload the final box out of the car and onto the ground. They go to bring it inside when they stumble on the unfamiliar steps. The box splits against the rough concrete, spewing paper up the stairs. They hastily grab at the papers, pulling them into the shambling box; essays, zines, two diplomas, tax documents. One arm holding the box together, CAROMINE reaches down and grabs the last paper: an acceptance for a summer internship at the Appaloosa Museum in the town over. They look around one more time, resignedly, and stumble back inside.

INT: LIVING ROOM - DAY

CAROMINE plunks the box down in their formidable pile of stuff and paces around it, nervously looking around the room. They check their phone again.

Midway through pushing the bookshelf against a wall, the sound of a car swells outside. Caromine rushes to the window and peers out, but the car zips past the house. The bookshelf settles against the wall. They scoop up an armful of clothes and toss them in a heap by the bedroom closet. CAROMINE drags the mattress back to the bedroom and lays it flat on the ground, a tight fit. They fetch some bedding and pull a corner of the sheet over the bed when they freeze, hearing the faint crunch of gravel outside. They thaw as the sound fades away.

They pull over two more corners when suddenly someone knocks firmly at the door. They drop the sheet, flabbergasted. They rush from window to window, but despite their craning they can't see the door from anywhere inside the house. They timidly lean up to the peephole but it's too aged and caked with grime to see through. Turning away from the door, they take a deep breath in and let out a big sigh, patting their shirt, fixing their tuck, tousling their hair. One more deep breath and they open the door.

It swings open to reveal DANIKA, a dykey genderqueer radiating an immense power in heavily stained white Carhart overalls over a gray wide strap muscle tank, bulky Red Wing boots, and a big green metal toolbox in one hand.

DANIKA

Hey, I'm the handyman. I hear
you've got a broken sink?

CAROMINE stands dumbfounded, clutching with their empty hands at nothing. Finally they manage words.

CAROMINE

It's, um, just through here.

CAROMINE turns away from DANIKA towards the kitchen, barely controlling their breath. They fidget against their tucked shirt, against these uptight fineries. They look around the half-setup living room.

CAROMINE (CONT'D)

Yeah I actually just got here today
and thought I'd start getting set
up but then I went to try the sink
and it just...

Caromine points to the twisted shrapnel on the kitchen counter. DANIKA sets their toolbox next to it, picks it up, and rolls it around in their palm confidently.

DANIKA

You wanna show me where you pulled this out from?

CAROMINE

Oh, right, of course.

CAROMINE squats down and peers into the under-cupboard. DANIKA squats down beside and sends goosebumps up CAROMINE'S whole right side.

CAROMINE (CONT'D)

Actually, I think it was just sitting on the ground when I squatted down to look after I pulled the stopper.

DANIKA pulls a flashlight out of one of many pockets on their overalls and leans in to the under-cupboard, pushing past CAROMINE. They rifle around with the sink's underbelly for a bit and then, muffled, ask:

DANIKA

What'd you say your name was again?

CAROMINE

Oh, uh, I don't think I did! It's Caromine.

DANIKA pulls themselves out of the darkness, wipes their hand on their pant leg, then offers it to CAROMINE, smiling.

DANIKA

Caromine? That's a cute one! I'm Danika, but you can call me Dani.

CAROMINE nervously meets the handshake. DANIKA's well-used muscle grips tight on CAROMINE's soft hand.

CAROMINE (A BIT OUT OF BREATH)

Okay, Dani, cool. Nice to meet you Dani!

DANIKA chuckles, charmed by the polite nicety, and releases their firm handhold.

DANIKA

So it looks like the bar connecting the plunger to the articulating joint that controls the valve is what you busted apart.

DANIKA convivially sets their hand on CAROMINE's upper arm while they rise to stand.

DANIKA (CONT'D)

You're stronger than you look!

CAROMINE blushes, dumbfounded again, while DANIKA grabs their toolbox off the counter. They turn to face CAROMINE and break the growing silence.

DANIKA (CONT'D)

Listen, you said you just got here? I don't have the part I need to fix this with me right now so I need to run to Tim's, the hardware store. If you're comfortable with it, I'd be happy to show you around town real quick?

CAROMINE was stupefied before, but now they're frozen, barely able to stammer out the words. They manage to power through their own terror.

CAROMINE

Uhhhm, Y-yeah wow that'd be... really super helpful actually if it's not too much trouble!

DANIKA

Of course not, It'd be my pleasure!

DANIKA leads CAROMINE back into the living room and toward the door. They hastily grab the keys and head out, locking it up. CAROMINE turns to see a dusty Subaru Brat. DANIKA muscles the passenger door open for CAROMINE then sidles over to the driver's side and hops in.

INT: DANIKA'S CAR - DAY

DANIKA turns the key in the ignition and the Brat sputters into life. After a K-turn they're off into town.

DANIKA

So what're you doing here in town?

CAROMINE sits small in the passenger seat, taking in the mixing smells of the grubby, well-lit interior: wood-chips littering the floor at their feet, a glass jar of aged buds in the cup holder, and something sharp and metallic on the dash.

CAROMINE

Well uh, I just finished up a master's program in Olympia doing museum education, and I got into this internship at the Appaloosa Museum nearby. Have you heard of it?

DANIKA rolls the windows down to let in the rushing dry summer air. They chuckle some more.

DANIKA

Oh gosh yeah I know the Appaloosa Museum! My friend Jenn is obsessed with horses, we took a gram of shrooms and just got lost in the rush of history, what the plains must've been like...

DANIKA trails off for a moment, looking out at the softly rolling hills in the distance.

DANIKA (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

Y'know I think we ended up at Tim's after that somehow... Once you figure out how to get comfy at Tim's it's really a charming place. Been around since long before I got here that's for sure. But last year they put in an Ace Hardware on the other side of town and I can tell it's made things harder. Hey here we are!

EXT: TIM'S HARDWARE STORE - DAY

DANIKA's Brat pulls up next to hulking four-by-four truck into one of the five parking spots outside Tim's, a cute mom-and-pop store with a hand-painted hardwood sign hanging above the door. DANIKA and CAROMINE climb out of the car. CAROMINE fixes the tuck on their shirt again and feels the sweat on their back. They lift a sleeve to wipe their forehead before sheepishly following DANIKA into Tim's.

INT: TIM'S HARDWARE STORE - DAY

A bell jangles as DANIKA swings the door open boldly. A damp and ancient smell hangs over the dusty, dimly-lit aisles, each brimming with tools and other useful-looking parts and pieces. A classic rock station plays hazily down from the rafters, sprinkling Lou Reed's "Walk on the Wild Side".

A big man in a polo shirt and khaki shorts blocks an aisle. He stops his confused interrogation of the pipe in his hand to stare down at the two of them suspiciously. DANIKA is unfazed and pushes past him brusquely, pulling CAROMINE with them. An aisle further in DANIKA leans in close to CAROMINE and whispers,

DANIKA

You can't let them know you're
afraid. You can't let them think
they know more than you do.

DANIKA puts a hand on CAROMINE's shoulder and they hold each other's gaze for a moment.

DANIKA turns away and down another aisle to find what they're looking for. They pull the rusted hunk out of their pocket and compare it to a few different glimmering shapes before deciding on one. They nod at CAROMINE and head to the register.

Immediately DANIKA strikes up conversation with the cashier, GARY, a middle-aged man with a well-kempt beard in a greasy old trucker hat and a warm flannel.

DANIKA (CONT'D)

Hey Gary, nice to see ya! How's
your boy gettin' on?

GARY

Oh he's healing up just fine Dani,
nothin' too serious. This all for
ya?

DANIKA

Yup, just a small trip today.

DANIKA finishes out the transaction while CAROMINE watches, fascinated. GARY pounds the last few buttons on the old analog register to make the change drawer lunge out, and tosses in DANIKA's coins. GARY smirks and waves at them as they jangle back out the front door and into the car.

INT: DANIKA'S CAR - DAY

The two of them plunk down into the seats of the Brat and DANIKA tosses the two metal pieces in the back seat and sits somber for a moment.

CAROMINE

What happened to his son?

DANIKA

Oh, he got into an accident a while back, I think it was two months ago now. He was helping his uncle out on the farm and his leg got caught under some big farm equipment. I can just tell Gary's been stressed about it...

DANIKA sits for another moment, looking out the window.

DANIKA (CONT'D)

Anyway, enough downers, if I'm going to show you anywhere else in town, it's gotta be Casper!

The Brat puttters through narrower and narrower streets until they pull into a parking spot at the edge of a few blocks of pedestrian-only downtown. They hop out of the car.

EXT: DOWNTOWN - DAY

The hot concrete sidewalk simmers underneath the two of them. CAROMINE stares up and around at the quaint old brick buildings.

CAROMINE

So, uh, who is Casper? Where are you taking me?

DANIKA (LAUGHING)

Oh no, gosh, Casper is the name of the coffeeshop! It's the best place to relax in town, and easily the best coffee. There it is!

DANIKA points at the next building down. Splattered on the side facing them is a faded mural of shimmering wheat fields, with the glowing name "CASPER!" emblazoned over it. An arrow points around the corner to a storefront of big tall windows, spilling the bright sunlight in onto tables and chairs and the people in them. DANIKA pushes the door open.

INT: CASPER - DAY

By the time CAROMINE gets to the doorway, DANIKA is already leaning over the counter hugging someone. CAROMINE has to take it all in: Art hanging on every wall, even from the ceiling. A second floor hangs over the back third of the room like a balcony, and underneath in an alcove an old man is engaged in spirited conversation, surround by books. What looks like a small stage takes up one corner of the room, currently populated with tables. DANIKA snaps them out of it.

DANIKA

Hey Caromine come over here!

DANIKA gestures jovially, now standing a normal distance away from a tall angular burnette wearing a sleeveless turtleneck tucked into high waisted jorts and sporting a big ponytail.

DANIKA (CONT'D)

Caromine, this is Jenn, the horse girl I was telling you about! What do you want to drink?

CAROMINE

Hi, uhm...

CAROMINE leans back, squinting up at the several panels of menu on the wall. After a few moments of increasingly panicked searching, they appeal to DANIKA and JENN.

CAROMINE (CONT'D)

Well uh, what do you normally get?

JENN interjects in her teasing nasally voice, holding a hand up to her mouth,

JENN

Oh Dani hasn't gotten anything but iced mochas since the temp went above 65... They're obsessed with summertime.

CAROMINE

An iced mocha sounds great actually, do you have oat milk?

JENN

Of course! I'll get that started right away.

CAROMINE reaches for their wallet to pay, but DANIKA beats them to it, only to be refused by JENN.

JENN (CONT'D)

Please, newcomer's on the house! Go find somewhere to sit.

JENN moves over behind the espresso machine and DANIKA stuffs their wallet back into their pocket. They head over to one of the sun-drenched tables by the window. They sit down and CAROMINE is still staring around at everything.

CAROMINE

This place is so cool! I wasn't expecting to find anything like this here...

DANIKA

Yeah it's a pretty nice spot isn't it... The bands they get in are pretty good sometimes, and you have got to come to the next party we throw, they can get pretty wild! Chains all over the walls, everyone all dressed up, you'd love it.

CAROMINE

Uhh, yeah, I guess I probably would...

CAROMINE looks around some more, struggling to imagine it as a place for a party. She sees the man with the books again.

CAROMINE (CONT'D)

What's up with that guy? Is this a bookstore too?

DANIKA

Oh that's Erik, he's in every Tuesday and Thursday. He used to have the cutest shop a few buildings down but he wasn't getting enough business to pay the rent on it. He worked something out with the owners here though so he can keep doing what he loves. He has a ton of good stuff, you should check it out.

JENN interrupts, sidling over with a tall pint glass in each hand. She sets CAROMINE's down first, then DANIKA's

JENN

Oat milk for you, and a few extra shots for you.

(MORE)

JENN (CONT'D)

And hey Dani, that girl with the bangs and the tattoo gun was here earlier asking about you again. You really should set something up with her.

Embarrassed, DANIKA hunches over into herself a bit.

DANIKA

Thanks Jenn, I'll be sure to do that...

DANIKA pulls their coffee up to their lips, pointedly ending the conversation, and JENN wanders back to the counter smirking, satisfied.

CAROMINE spins their coffee in front of them, considering it carefully. They sip at it uncertainly, but pleasant surprise washes over their face. Their shoulders relax backward, and the cool beverage visibly enervates them enough to start asking questions.

CAROMINE

So how is it you seem to know everyone in this town? Did you grow up here?

DANIKA

Oh no, I moved here something like eight years ago now. It wasn't easy at first I'll tell you what, the local politics around here are pretty... unsavory.

Leaning back into their chair, DANIKA takes another sip of coffee and looks out the window.

DANIKA (CONT'D)

Honestly, I came here with an ex, and, well, to say the least, it didn't work out. I had to make a whole new group of friends, but it turns out there was this whole radical underbelly I hadn't been able to see. Turns out that's the case most places. I met a few people that helped me... well, I wouldn't be who I am without them. I started to realized I had this confidence inside me I never knew I had. So I started doing whatever I wanted and meeting as many people as I could.

(MORE)

DANIKA (CONT'D)

I figured out I love working with my hands, got into an apprenticeship, and now it's my whole dang livelihood!

DANIKA takes another gulp of coffee and sighs.

DANIKA (CONT'D)

Y'know, everyone has so much shit going on, and when you really start to pay attention it's so easy to love somebody. Soon enough this place feels more like home than anywhere else ever has.

They pause long enough to look back at CAROMINE, who has been totally enraptured, sipping away at their coffee and staring wide-eyed at DANIKA. DANIKA snaps out of their reverie and starts busting up laughing at CAROMINE's intensity. CAROMINE can't help but lose their composure too, and they laugh together for a little while.

DANIKA (CONT'D)

Listen, let's get out of here, we still got a sink to fix.

They both down the rest of their coffees and stand up, heading for the door. JENN shouts out from behind the espresso machine, waving,

JENN

See ya later Dani! Nice to meet you Caromine!

EXT: DOWNTOWN - DAY

DANIKA pushes open the door and holds it for CAROMINE. They chat and laugh while they retrace their steps down the sweltering concrete to the Brat. They climb inside and slam the car doors.

INT: DANIKA'S CAR - DAY

CREDITS ROLL over more lively chatting and laughter as the two drive back out to CAROMINE's place.