

Who Is Jamee?

Everybody knew Jamee, but nobody liked her. Her parents were just strange enough to give her an extra 'e' where most people would place an 'i,' but Jamee was different. Not just different from her parents, but *really* different. She was weird. Some people even called her a freak. Like I said, nobody liked her.

The summer she started packing was strange. She was out more around town than usual, walking slowly down our small town streets, like she was drinking in scenery with her eyes, but yet somehow outside, maybe above, the world around her. Once in a while I would be on the street when she would pass and I would watch her without hesitation, without fear, and without turning away. She was too lost inside herself to notice me staring at her anyway. Once in a while though, she would look up and our eyes would meet. Her eyes were always sad then, always filled with unanswered questions and unfulfilled needs. She never looked at me for long though, retreating to the comfort of her inner self as quickly as she had come out of it.

Sometimes she would walk down the street carrying a new necessity for the trip she was planning. Sometimes she would carry a bag from her house that she would drop outside of goodwill. I watched her carry the backpack she is loading up now when she bought it at the five and dime. She didn't look up at me that day.

I don't know why I can't stop watching her as she folds the few clothes that she is actually taking, or why she even let me in here for that matter. I see her put a picture in her bag. It's old and tattered, and I want to ask her about it, but it doesn't seem appropriate since I have rarely asked her anything in the past. Suddenly, I feel so out of place in her room, but I don't want to leave... not until she does anyway.

Most people think that she is a snob. She doesn't say much to anyone, ever; not on the street, not in the old quiet recesses of our buildings. When she has to speak, like when she is buying something from one of the old shopkeepers, she is incredibly polite and well-mannered, but she never speaks more than she has to.

Even nearly an hour ago, when I couldn't stop myself from asking if she was really leaving and if it would be okay if I helped her pack, she didn't say anything. She had just taken my hand and led me into her room. I haven't really helped her pack though, unless perpetual gazing can be considered helpful.

I still don't know where she is going... no one knows, and she still hasn't spoken since we've been in here. I want to ask, but I am afraid of what she might say. I don't know why I'm afraid, but I am. When the latch of her bag clicks shut and she pulls the bag off of the table, letting it dangle from her hand, I know that it's almost time, and I follow her back outside. I'm even more scared now. Why am I scared... and doesn't this silence intimidate her at all?

The cool fall air hits my cheeks and I pull on my jacket. Hers is corduroy. It looks soft, but I stop myself from touching it. I have the oddest feeling that if I do, I will grab a handful and refuse to let go. I know she doesn't want me to ask, but the questions are weighing so heavily, and I am vitally aware that when she goes I will never see her again.

"Where are you going... Jamee?" As I say her name, I think about the extra 'e' and how there is a reason that her name is special. It suits her... it fits. A lot of people's names don't fit them at all, but hers does. The special, the unique... it really fits her. It's right.

"Los Angeles," she says quietly, almost as if she is telling me a great secret that only the two of us know. I have the suspicion that is exactly what it is. I realize that it is the first time that I have ever heard her speak directly to me. I'm glad for the two words.

Her eyes look different now. They don't appear sad. They are vibrant and shiny, and something else. There is an emotion in them... something that I can't place. I'm just not used to it. People don't get that look around here. Only Jamee.

"Are you scared," I ask, wondering if it's the right question. I've never watched someone leave before. People don't leave around here. They just don't. I wonder if Jamee is aware that she is breaking some unwritten law. She never does answer me, but she smiles. I don't think that she would admit to me her fear even if it existed, so I decide to rephrase and keep her talking. I loved the sound of her voice a moment before, and I want to coax it out again.

"Is it big? I mean..." I continue, breaking into a shy smile that I can't seem to stop. "Is it a lot different to be there... in Los Angeles?" I am pretty well certain that I didn't need to include the last part, but for some reason I had descended into ramble mode, and hadn't been able to stop the flow of words leaking from my lips. The smile she is wearing tells me she noticed this.

"I don't know," she replies to my question very gently. Her lips stay set in the small, expectant smile and her eyes glow with the excitement of an adventure I wish I could understand more. "I've never been."

And with that, she throws her canvas backpack over her shoulder, turns her, finally, genuinely joyful eyes my way, allows that warm, now full smile to rest on me temporarily, and then spins to set off on her way.

Faith, hope, and a new feeling I can't recognize spreads like scorching lava through my veins as I watch her walk away. I always thought that I was complacent in my opinion of her. No one liked her... I just didn't care. But as her foot falls grow softer in my ears and her image smaller in my eyes, I realize it was not complacency. Instead, I had been torn.

There was part of me, the part like all of the others, like everyone who hated her, that could never understand Jamee. Why was she so unusual? Why wasn't she like me? That part was the jealous part too, the part that wondered why she could be so free in a place that was so confining. Why did she seem to have courage that we couldn't find?

Another part, the bigger part... the majority that allowed itself to be controlled by the much more influential minority part... loved Jamee in a way I had never fully comprehended until that moment. The moment of no return. The moment she would never come back.

She was fading completely, a dot in the distance. In a single instant, she would be no more. And I knew. I hated Jamee. I loved Jamee. And I never really knew her.