Receiving Mood

B Alan Bourgeois · Opening excerpt · 1 of 2

Julian used to wake up like someone had hit an alarm inside his bones.

Most mornings in his thirties started with a jolt: his mind checking email before his eyes were fully open, heart pounding with lists—bills, deadlines, expectations, all the invisible weight of proving he deserved the space he took up.

Noise was his normal. Notifications, news, opinions, other people's crises. He measured his worth in how quickly he answered, how much he fixed, how much he said yes when he meant no.

He thought that was being responsible. Mature. Strong.

What it really was: chasing every noise outside.

He wore it like armor—a fast talker with a planner full of plans, a "go-to guy" for everyone but himself. When he wrote songs back then, they were tight, clever things about heartbreak and hustle. They got some plays, a few shows, a small fanbase that liked the way his voice broke on certain notes. But he never wrote about the thing that scared him most.

Silence.

Because in silence he could hear the truth he didn't want to face: he had no idea what he actually wanted. He only knew what he was running from.

# # #

Reading sample — continued

The breaking point was embarrassingly small.

No car crash, no big betrayal, no dramatic hospital scene. Just a Tuesday.

He was in a studio, tracking vocals for yet another “almost” song. The producer, a patient woman named Deja, stopped him mid-take.

“Your pitch is fine,” she said through the talkback mic, “but your chest sounds like a war zone. You hear that?”

Julian frowned. “What’s that even mean?”

“It means you’re singing like you’re about to get fired or dumped,” she said. “From who, I don’t know. But it’s not this song.”

He forced a laugh, but something in him snapped anyway. Not loud, not dramatic—more like a hairline fracture in the mask he’d worn his entire life.

When the session ended, he didn’t go home. He walked.

Block after block, headphones on with no music playing, just the city’s noise trying to drown him, and failing for once. Somewhere between a coffee shop and a laundromat, his legs gave out and he sat on the curb.

His heart was racing, but not in that productive, caffeinated way. A slow, heavy thump, like it was knocking from the inside out.