

LEAVING IRNIA

Written by

Jelena Borojević

FADE IN:

INT. HOUSE/DEN - DAY

JAMES, 60, lies on an old couch. One hand rests on his stomach, the other hangs to the ground, holding a burning cigarette. He stares at the ceiling.

The room is cluttered with piles of books and comic books. Dust covers everything. Thick cigarette smoke suffocates this small space. Daylight is pushed away by heavy curtains. The ambience is darkness.

On the ceiling - a long CRACK. James stares at it. The crack hovers above him like a dark snake. Acidic pain fills his eyes. His face deforms, he grips his shirt, and sobs to himself.

The cigarette has burned its way up to his fingers. It burns him. James jerks and quickly extinguishes the cigarette among a pile of others in an ashtray on the floor.

He wipes his face on the sleeve of his worn-out shirt. He looks horrible.

He checks the time - 9 a.m. He panics and stands to tuck in his shirt and smooth down his hair. It doesn't do much to better his appearance.

EMILY (O.S.)

James! Breakfast!

He rushes to sit at his desk, then pretends to work on some papers. He hears footsteps approach.

EMILY, James' wife, 55, opens the door. She waves the cigarette smoke away from her face in disgust. Coughs.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Did you hear? Are you having
breakfast, or do you still have
work to do?

James doesn't lift his head to look at his wife.

JAMES

I'm just finishing up. I'll be
right there.

EMILY

OK.

Emily's eyes burn from the smoke and the smell of the den. She scans her husband, hunched over his desk. She looks disappointed.

JAMES
(head still down)
Is NICK eating, too?

EMILY
(shrugs)
If he's hungry.

Emily exits the room and closes the door behind her. James sighs and releases his body from the lie. He slouches in the chair.

Soon, his eyes lose focus and stare at a random spot on his desk.

The darkness returns to bind him.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Emily sets the table for breakfast. James, at the table, patiently waits for the food to be served. His aimless gaze has now shifted to a spot on the kitchen table.

EMILY
(to the ceiling)
Nick! Breakfast! Come down!

Emily takes a better look at her husband. Notices his red, swollen eyes. Decides not to say anything.

JAMES
What's for breakfast?

EMILY
Last night's dinner.

James nods in a sort of approval.

NICK, 34, their son, enters the kitchen. He takes his place at the table without acknowledging anyone else in the kitchen. He wears worn out sweatpants and a washed out t-shirt with a MARVEL logo in the center.

James stares at the t-shirt. His face almost deforms again. This time, he swallows the pain, and shifts his gaze into the plate in front of him.

NICK
What's for breakfast?

EMILY
Meatloaf and mashed potatoes.

NICK
(confused)
Meatloaf for breakfast?

EMILY
We had a lot left over from last night. I made the mash with extra butter, the way you like it.
(beat)
And cherry sauce.

NICK
Cherry sauce?

EMILY
Your AUNT'S summer cherries. She sent over a batch of frozen cherries from last year.

NICK
Great. Charity freezer food.

Beat.

JAMES
Don't pester your mother.

EMILY
Don't start. It's fine. I'll make something fresh for dinner.

NICK
Good.

Beat.

The two men sit in silence. A visible discomfort looms between them - even hate. Bitterness, loss, and disappointment.

JAMES
You're awfully picky with your food.

EMILY
James.

Nick looks at his father, borderline threatening.

NICK
Don't like frozen food.

JAMES
You're not eating frozen food.
You're eating reheated food.

NICK
Same difference.

Emily rushes to serve the food in an effort to diffuse the situation.

EMILY
(nervous)
Alright, everyone. Dig in!

James looks at his plate. A slice of meatloaf with a spoonful of cherry sauce and a small pile of instant mashed potatoes.

EMILY (CONT'D)
(to Nick)
How is your project going?

NICK
It's fine.

EMILY
Anything new happening?

NICK
I'm working on it.

Emily sinks in defeat from this short-lived conversation. Dramatically, she cuts the slice of meatloaf in her plate, as if an entire roast was in front of her.

The two men are nowhere near her enthusiasm or her strength to pretend that the situation is anything better than it is.

JAMES
What project?

EMILY
Nick wants to start his own business. Isn't that great, James?

JAMES
Business?

EMILY
(to Nick)
Tell him, Nick.

Nick doesn't respond. Picks at his food.

EMILY (CONT'D)

(to James)

He had this great idea to start a business installing those solar panels. On houses. It's very popular to have one right now. Nick says it helps the environment and also saves some money on the electricity bill. Isn't that great?

Nick takes another bite of his breakfast and makes a disgusted face. James sees it.

JAMES

(to Nick)

What do you know about solar panels?

EMILY

James, don't start. He's trying!

JAMES

(to Emily)

Trying to do what?

(to Nick)

What do you know about solar panels? Do you have a business plan? Where are you getting the money to fund this?

EMILY

James!

JAMES

Every time, Emily. Every time! He's thirty-four years old, for Christ's sake, and daydreaming about a business he knows nothing about!

Nick's rage boils in his seat.

EMILY

Stop it!

JAMES

(to Nick)

Do you not see that we're dividing food into next-day portions? You don't think you could get an actual job and help this family?!

NICK

(rage)

And whose fault is that?!

(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

(beat)

Huh? Whose fault is it that instant
mash is now a delicacy in this
house?

EMILY

Nick, no!

James is taken aback. His face drops from anger to distress.

Red in the face, Nick slams the cutlery into his plate.
CLANG. Then marches back up to his room and SLAMS the door
behind him.

A thick silence falls on the kitchen.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Did you have to do that?

Emily picks up Nick's plate and takes it up to his room as if
he were a child.

James is now alone in the kitchen. His whole body tense.

EMILY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

(partially audible from
upstairs)

Nick, your father didn't--

(inaudible)

--only saying it because--

NICK (O.S.)

(shouting)

I hate him! I'm sick of this house!

EMILY (O.S.)

(shouting)

Nick, no! It's ok, mommy doesn't
want you to leave!

James picks up his plate.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

SPIKE, 13, the family's BLACK Labrador, slouches in front of
his dog house. The years have caught up with him. Much like
James, he sits motionless. Eyes fixed onto a spot on the
ground.

Then, he notices James approaching and wags his tail.

James places his plate in front of the black dog.

JAMES

Here's a special breakfast for you,
buddy.

Spike is excited about the food. He gives the plate a quick sniff, then immediately starts to eat. However, his jaw is weak. He can barely chew the food.

Still, he tries his best to eat through everything. Slowly.

James gently pets the dog's head.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Good boy. There's a good boy.

James watches his old friend struggle. The mash is already gone, but the meatloaf is difficult to chew.

James takes the slice of meatloaf and breaks it into tiny pieces, then feeds each piece to Spike.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Should we skip the sauce?

Spike sniffs the purple goo of cherry sauce, then looks at James.

JAMES (CONT'D)

My thoughts, exactly.

James takes the plate.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Want me to get you anything?

Spike seems content.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Maybe we can go for a walk later?
If you're feeling alright?

Spike wags his tail. He is super excited about the walk.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Alright. I'll come get you later,
buddy.

James strokes the dog a few more times, then leaves him to rest in his usual position in front of the dog house.

INT. HOUSE/HALLWAY - DAY

James closes the door behind him.

Emily and Nick come down the stairs together. James watches as they enter the kitchen in silence. They know that James is there, but they don't acknowledge him. Mother and son begin to talk in hushed voices.

James can't hear them. He doesn't try to hear them either.

INT. DEN - DAY

James hides the plate in a drawer, then takes a seat at his desk. He stretches his legs underneath the desk and leans back. The chair tilts slightly.

There are no voices to be heard outside, only the footsteps of his two family members every now and then. He is not part of their world anymore.

He looks up at the newspaper cutouts above his desk. A collection of newspaper stories that all describe the same thing. He scans them.

INSERT - NEWSPAPER CUTOUTS:

"TRAGEDY STRIKES SMALL TOWN: Derailed train leaves at least 26 dead and 51 injured. Cause of derailment unknown."

"HUMAN ERROR? Train derailment that left 37 dead and 63 injured may have been driver's fault."

"The accident occurred 23 minutes into the train's journey at 7:06 p.m."

"2 YEARS LATER AND STILL NO ANSWERS! What happened to the Phoenix Express no. 1843?"

BACK TO SCENE.

James scans the many other similar headlines on the wall. He looks lost.

He stands up and begins to rearrange the headlines. He removes the push pin from a cutout and then secures it somewhere else on the wall. He is very meticulous about this. After each new cutout placement, he takes a step back and examines his work.

The cutouts have numerous pin holes pressed through them. He has done this many times before.

James takes out a cigarette pack from his pocket and lights one. The smoke covers his face and spreads across the small den. The vice claims him.

Beat.

His phone rings. He takes the phone out of his trouser pocket.

JAMES
 (into the phone)
 Hello?

On the other end, CARL, 62, his closest friend, speaks in too loud of a voice.

CARL (O.S.)
 James! I'm back! You free?

JAMES
 (into the phone)
 As free as I can be.

CARL (O.S.)
 Same place as always?

JAMES
 (into the phone)
 Alright. I'll see you there.

James hangs up.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Emily and Nick are still at the kitchen table. Emily glares at James for a moment, then gets up to check the oven. Nick ignores him.

James passes them and heads to a kitchen cabinet. They behave as if the other is not present.

He takes out a box of medicine. Different-colored pills are divided into times of day and days of the week. James takes two pills from the "morning" section and drinks them with a glass of water.

No one acknowledges him.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

James' car is parked in front of the house.

He peeks behind the corner of the house to check on Spike in the backyard. The dog lies in front of his dog house. He sees James and immediately lifts his head from his paws. Tail wags.

JAMES

When I come back. Promise.

Spike barks.

James gets into his car and drives off.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

James and Carl are at a table in the corner.

The restaurant is practically empty. Two bored WAITERS chat near the bar. A few FAMILIES occupy the booths.

Carl wears an expensive business suit, which doesn't match his cheerful face. His phone is on the table. He has two full meals in front of him. A burger and fries, with a side of pasta. James eats grilled cheese on toast.

CARL

(annoyed)

Why didn't you get a proper meal? I told you, my treat!

JAMES

No, no. It's alright. Had a big breakfast. I just wanted to keep you company.

Carl doesn't really buy this excuse. He shoves a massive twirl of pasta into his mouth.

CARL

(full mouth)

If TABITHA saw this, she would kill me.

James looks at each plate.

JAMES

Which one?

CARL

Both. Me stuffing my face, and you eating a poor-ass excuse for a sandwich.

James smiles.

JAMES

I'm fine.
(beat)
How was Rome?

CARL

Rome was great! Full business suite
in the hotel, champagne all around,
pretty girls everywhere! Good thing
my wife was not with me, eh?

James gives him a look.

CARL (CONT'D)

(eye roll)
I'm JO-KING.

Carl continues to stuff his face. James takes tiny bites, as
if timing his meal to end at the same time as Carl's.

CARL (CONT'D)

Hey, when are you going to travel a
little? You need to see the world.
Can't just be stuck at home.

JAMES

My job isn't as exciting as yours,
Carl.

CARL

You know what I mean.
(beat)
A change of scenery would do you
good.

James eats a small piece of his toast.

JAMES

A walk in the park is about as much
as I can afford.

CARL

Then a walk in the park it is.

Beat.

Carl looks at the shadow that is left of his friend.

CARL (CONT'D)

(sincerely)
You did everything you could have
done, mate.

James stops eating for a moment. He sort of aligns the toast pieces around the plate, as if it were a game of Tetris.

JAMES
It doesn't feel like I did.

Beat.

CARL
James, if you ever need anything--

JAMES
I know. Thank you.
(beat)
I know.

Carl looks sad. He goes back to his food. He stuffs the last few massive spoonfuls of pasta into his mouth, then follows it with the last bite of the burger.

James stabs the last few pieces of toast with his fork, and does the same.

The meal slowly comes to an end now. Carl raises his hand to call the WAITER.

CARL
Hope you don't mind, but I need to get ready for a meeting tomorrow.

JAMES
Of course. Don't worry about it.

CARL
Also, need to get a present for the wife. Yeesh!

JAMES
Is it her birthday?

Carl looks a little confused.

CARL
No.

The waiter approaches. Carl pays with a shiny golden card. The waiter passes the card through the handheld machine, then returns it to Carl. The waiter leaves.

Beat.

CARL (CONT'D)
You look old, my friend.

JAMES
Hey, thanks.

CARL
You do.

James stares back at Carl. Doesn't know what to say.

CARL (CONT'D)
It will get better.

Beat.

JAMES
Yeah.
(beat)
It will.

Carl's phone rings on the table. He picks up.

CARL
(into the phone)
Hey, honey!
(beat)
Yes, I'm on my way. Just grabbed a
snack with James.
(to James)
She says, hi!

JAMES
Say hi back.

CARL
(into the phone)
He says hi back. Huh?
(beat)
Yes, yes I know. I'm going to buy
it now!

Carl takes his coat from the chair, waves at James, and exits the restaurant while still on his phone.

James is alone at the table.

INT./EXT. JAMES' CAR - DAY

James sits in his parked car in front of the restaurant. He holds the wheel and stares ahead at nothing in particular. He looks exhausted. Hypnotized by his own thoughts.

Finally, he snaps out of it and inserts the key into the ignition.

He turns the key. The car makes a weak CLICK sound, then gives up.

JAMES

The heck?

James tries one more time. CLICK CLICK CLICK.

He pulls the hood latch.

EXT. STREET - DAY

James raises the hood to examine the engine.

JAMES

(to the car)

What is wrong with you?

He scans the engine, then shifts his focus to the battery - the likely culprit. Great. His day just went from bad to worse.

Across the road, a WOMAN, 40s, sits on a bus stop bench.

Her dark hair is pulled back in a bun. Her appearance is minimalistic. For some reason, she wears an apron. Her thin body looks frail.

She stares directly at James.

James stands from beneath the hood. Then hits his head on the way up.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Shit!

(holds head)

Fuckin'. God damn. Shit.

He inspects his hand. No blood.

Angry, he looks around him for a source of help. Then, he notices her.

He looks behind him. No one there. He's the target.

He looks awkwardly at her, then back at the engine. Then back at her. The woman doesn't move. Continues to stare at him.

James gives her a small wave. She doesn't respond.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You alright there, miss?

The woman doesn't answer. Just stares at him.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Waiting for the bus?

Nothing.

Confused, James bends down and goes back to the engine.

After what feels like a whole minute.

WOMAN
Yes.

James lifts his head from beneath the hood. Carefully this time.

JAMES
Yes?

WOMAN
Yes, I am waiting for the bus.

JAMES
(baffled by her apron)
Where are you going?

WOMAN
Home.

James isn't sure how to react. The woman looks both normal and alien at the same time.

JAMES
Right.
(beat)
I'm sure the bus will be here soon.

He gives her a quick smile and dives beneath the hood again.

WOMAN
What's wrong?

JAMES
Uh... I think the battery on my car
is dead. It's alright, it's not a
big deal.

The woman watches him fiddle with his thoughts. He doesn't look like he has this figured out at all.

WOMAN
Will you be needing the bus?

JAMES

No. The bus doesn't go in my direction.

Beat.

WOMAN

Where do you live?

James waves his hand in a long motion.

JAMES

Other side.

She thinks about this for a moment.

WOMAN

Do you need help starting the car?

James is confused by her offer.

JAMES

That's ok, thank you.

(beat)

This is very messy. Not much that the two of us can do, I'm afraid.

WOMAN

Not me. My husband. He could help you start the car. It's happened to him before.

James looks around him as if to check if her husband is nearby. He isn't.

JAMES

Er... no, that's alright. I'll call for help, thank you.

The woman returns to her motionless state.

James takes out his phone and scrolls through the contacts. Many names pass underneath his thumb. They form a blur as James scrolls through them. His thumb looks afraid to tap on any of them.

He turns off the screen and puts the phone back in his pocket.

The woman watches.

He takes out his wallet and checks the contents. Five dollars, no cards.

Beat.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Where, er... Where is your husband?

WOMAN
Home.

JAMES
Isn't it weird to come home with a
stranger and a request?

WOMAN
My husband loves helping people.

JAMES
(beat)
No kidding.

He is out of ideas.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Is your home far?

WOMAN
No.

James checks his watch. Frowns.

With no other option, he locks the car and crosses the street
towards the woman. He sits on the bench next to her.

JAMES
I'm uh... I'm very sorry to
inconvenience you like this.

The woman immediately stands up and heads down the road.
Startled, James stands to follow her.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Hey! Where are you going?

WOMAN
Home.

James looks back at the bus stop.

JAMES
(confused)
Huh?

EXT. LUXURIOUS HOUSE/DRIVEWAY - DAY

The woman reaches the gates of the house and enters. She doesn't turn to look at James, only continues her way inside the home.

James reaches the gate. He ogles at the luxury of the home for a moment, then follows the woman inside.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

As James enters the home, a man, 40s, LUKE, happily greets the woman.

LUKE
Darling! You're home.

He hugs the woman and lifts her off the floor. She is not nearly as excited as him, and remains emotionless throughout this encounter.

Luke then realizes that James has entered the house. Immediately, a huge, welcoming smile breaks across his face.

LUKE (CONT'D)
Oh! We have a guest!

Luke is an exceptionally good looking man. His features are soft, slim, and elegant. His hair is wavy, and perfectly styled.

Luke comes over to shake James' hand.

LUKE (CONT'D)
Hey there! I'm Luke. To what do I owe the pleasure?

James is shocked by how welcoming Luke is to an unknown man in his home. He quickly tries to explain the situation.

JAMES
I'm very sorry about this interruption, but my car won't start and your wife was very generous in offering me help. She mentioned that perhaps you would be able to help me start it.

LUKE
Oh, don't you hate it when that happens? No matter how much we take care of those cars, they always find a way to let us down, eh?

JAMES

I guess so.

LUKE

Happy to help you, my friend. Let me just grab a coat.

(motions towards the living room)

Please, make yourself at home. I'll be right back.

Luke leaves.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

James reaches the sofa and sits down, awkwardly. The woman has already made herself comfortable on the opposite sofa. She flicks through a magazine.

James takes a moment to inspect the room.

Spotless and beautifully decorated. The kind of house that is never left unattended. Everything is in the right place, and nothing is touched or moved unless it absolutely must be.

He feels embarrassed to be here.

The woman looks at him.

WOMAN

Told you. He loves to help.

JAMES

(awkward)

Thank you. I really appreciate it.

The woman waves her hand in dismissal.

WOMAN

It's nothing.

Luke walks into the living room.

LUKE

Alright, my man. Where is this car that needs fixing?

James stands.

JAMES

It's just down the road. It's the battery. It's been messing with me for a while.

LUKE
Alright. Let's hop into my car and
we can get it sorted out right now.

JAMES
Thank you so much!

LUKE
(to the woman)
Darling, do you need anything on my
way back?

The woman gently shakes her head.

JAMES
(to the woman)
Thanks again.

WOMAN
You're welcome.

Luke and James leave. The woman remains on the sofa. Calm.
She flicks through the magazine.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Cables connect the front of Luke's car and the front of
James' car.

Luke stands between the two vehicles. He gives James the
thumbs up.

INT./EXT. JAMES' CAR - DAY

James turns the key in the ignition. His car does a very long
attempt to start, and then, finally, the roar of his engine
can be heard. It worked.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Luke smiles.

LUKE
Up and running, my friend!

JAMES
(head outside the car
window)
Thank you!

Luke disconnects the cables. He neatly folds the cables into a toolbox and puts it back into the trunk of his car.

James gets out of his own car and walks up to Luke.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry to have bothered you.
This really means a lot.

LUKE

Not at all! You will need to get that battery replaced as soon as possible, though. It won't serve you much longer.

JAMES

Yeah. I'll get it done first thing tomorrow morning.

James puts his hand out to shake Luke's. Luke immediately accepts the offer.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I don't know what else to say.
You've saved me both money and dignity.

LUKE

Oh, nonsense. You're too kind!

JAMES

(beat)
Let me buy you a beer when you have time? Anytime.
(beat)
Whenever you're free. Now.
Tomorrow. Next week.

James is not smooth.

LUKE

You know what...
(beat)
No, it's embarrassing.

JAMES

No, please. Anything.

LUKE

It's just... since you offered the beer.
(beat)
This is probably out of the blue, but... Do you bowl?

JAMES

Oh... I haven't bowled in years.
Since way back in college.

LUKE

Excellent! We have a tournament
coming up. Tonight.

JAMES

Oh, no I'm really not good. College
was a long time ago. I don't even
know how much of it I remember.

LUKE

Don't need you to do well, the rest
of the team are pros. But one
friend got sick recently and can't
come.

Beat.

JAMES

Who are you playing against?

LUKE

My old high school team. I was
really into bowling in high school.
But these guys, man. I could never
beat them. They were just too good.

(beat)

You free tonight?

James thinks about it.

JAMES

OK. What time tonight?

LUKE

Six P-M. Come to my house I'll take
us there.

(chuckling)

Don't want your car getting in the
way of us winning the tournament.

James lets out a nervous laugh.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Alright then. Have a safe trip
home! I'll see you later!

James closes the hood of his car.

JAMES

See you then! Thank you!

Luke closes his own hood.

Both men enter their vehicles and head their separate ways.

INT. HOUSE/HALLWAY - DAY

James enters his home to no greeting.

His wife and son are in the living room. A game show blasts from the TV. They both have a massive bowl of popcorn each.

Neither cares that James has returned home. No one turns to greet him, and no one asks where he has been.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

James opens the fridge. It is almost completely empty. Three eggs, one half-empty bottle of orange juice, some butter, and a single onion. He closes the fridge.

He opens one of the kitchen drawers. He sees a packet of dry ramen noodles among random cutlery and utensils. He takes it.

INT. DEN - DAY

James closes the door behind him. He takes out the cigarette pack from his trouser pocket and lights one.

He sits on the couch and opens the ramen. He breaks a small bunch of it, tilts his head back, and throws it into his mouth. Crumbs fall everywhere.

He does this again and catches sight of the crack on the ceiling.

He takes one long pull from the cigarette and blows a massive cloud of smoke directly towards it.

Laughter and applause screech from the TV in the living room. James closes his eyes and tries to block the sound from his mind. It doesn't work.

He fiddles with his fingers and takes quick, long pulls from his cigarette - almost neurotic. The rising smoke makes the den look and feel claustrophobic.

A framed photo on his desk grabs his attention. Finally, this slows down his neurotic behavior. He rests his head sideways on the couch, and stares lovingly at the photo.

In the photo are four people. James, Emily, Nick, and HELEN, 22, with a huge smile on her face. One hand around her father's shoulders. She wears jeans and a t-shirt with a MARVEL logo in the middle. The one that Nick has now.

James stares at the memory captured in the photograph. A sharp contrast to the family today. He almost begins to cry again. Instead, he takes one last pull from his cigarette, then extinguishes it in the ashtray.

He moves over to a cupboard and opens a drawer full of shirts. He browses through them. They all look completely worn out and their original color has faded.

He looks at his own reflection in the wall mirror. The shirt that he wears now doesn't look much better either.

He goes back to his desk and opens another drawer. There are \$40 inside. He takes the money and stuffs it in his pocket.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

James leaves the house and gets into his car. He backs out of the driveway and heads for the road.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

He walks through the massive supermarket. Passes the women's clothes and the endless baby aisle. Finally, he reaches the men's section, which has considerably fewer things on offer.

James looks at the plaid shirts that are on display. They are all universally checkered, and only differ in their color shade.

He picks out a green one and checks the price - \$20. He browses through a few more shirts and chooses a dingy-looking blue one. He checks the price - \$9.

He takes it.

INT. HOUSE/DEN - DAY

James unwraps his new shirt from the cheap plastic wrapping. He tries to iron out the embedded folding lines with a few firm strokes of his hand. It doesn't work.

He moves over to the wall mirror and tries the shirt. He buttons it up and checks his reflection. He isn't delighted by what he sees, but it'll have to do.

He takes out a comb from the drawer and combs his hair a little to the side. He looks like a 14-year-old heavy smoker.

He sits on the couch. Checks the time. Exhales.

He gets an idea.

James picks up an imaginary bowling bowl in his hand. Stands. He adjusts his fingers for a good grip. Then, he takes a deep breath and focuses on the imaginary lane in front of him.

He concentrates.

He takes a few steps towards the lane, swings the ball behind him, then throws it. He freezes, then watches the imaginary bowling ball speed towards the pins. Score.

He does this a few times. Sometimes scores, sometimes embarrassingly misses the pins - of his imaginary bowling game.

He pumps his fist with every score, and pats the back of an imaginary teammate that didn't do so well.

He realizes that the practice makes him sweat. He opens the window and raises his hands to dry his underarms. He stares out the window with his arms up.

Across the road, the NEIGHBOR mows the lawn. The man is very meticulous and seems to enjoy the work. James watches him. Admires his patience.

After a while, the NEIGHBOR'S WIFE comes out of the house. She carries a sandwich and a glass. When she reaches her husband, she gives him a peck on the lips and offers the sandwich. The husband happily accepts.

He engages in a conversation with his wife. Then, he takes a swig from the glass and keeps the sandwich. He gives his wife a kiss on the cheek. She giggles and goes back to the house.

James is visibly jealous. Defeated, he lowers his arms and closes the window.

He lies on the couch, carefully, so that he doesn't further wrinkle the shirt. His enthusiasm for the bowling game disappears. Once again, he is alone on the couch staring at a crack on the ceiling.

His heavy eyelids close. He dozes off.

INT. DEN - DAY

DREAM:

James is asleep on the couch in the same position. But everything else is different.

His clothes are new. A crisp white shirt and perfectly ironed suit trousers. The den is clean and organized. No cigarette smoke. No curtains. Soothing sunlight warms the den.

James' phone rings. He wakes from his nap and looks at the phone's screen.

On the screen: HELEN

James picks up the phone.

JAMES
Hi, honey!

HELEN
Hi, dad!

JAMES
(sleepy)
How are you doing?

HELEN
Good, good! Hey dad, I'm coming over today!

JAMES
(excited)
Really?

HELEN
Yes! I'm packing right now.

JAMES
Are you sure? I know you have exams soon.

HELEN
Dad, I'm a senior. I think I've figured it out by now.

JAMES
What do you want for dinner?

HELEN
Pizza?

JAMES
(smiling)
Deal. I'm glad we chose the healthy option.

HELEN
Will Nick be home, too?

JAMES
I'll let him know to drop by after work. He'll be so happy to see you.

HELEN
Good! I bought you guys a few presents. But they're edible presents, so you better all be home.

JAMES
Oh, honey, you shouldn't have. Save your money!

HELEN
Don't worry, dad. Again, I have it figured out!

JAMES
(sighs)
I know you do.

HELEN
Dad?

JAMES
Yes?

HELEN
(panic)
Dad?

JAMES
Helen? Yes. Can you hear me?

HELEN
(complete panic)
Dad! Dad!

END DREAM.

INT. DEN - DAY

Back to reality.

James jolts awake, covered in sweat. He takes deep breaths to calm himself. Terrified.

He checks the time - 5:00 p.m.

Wobbly on his feet, he moves to the mirror. He smooths down his hair and checks the shirt. Fixes the collar.

He opens the door to leave the den and catches sight of the framed photo again. He looks at the face of his daughter for a moment, pauses, then leaves the room.

EXT. LUXURIOUS HOUSE - NIGHT

James reaches the front door of the house and rings the doorbell. Luke answers the door almost instantly.

LUKE
Hey, you're here!

JAMES
(tries to look happy)
Hello.

Luke can see that something has shaken James up.

LUKE
You alright?

JAMES
Totally. Rough day that's all.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

James stands in the hallway and waits for Luke. Luke browses through the mail. Advertisements, bills, and letters.

In his right hand is a small, golden DAGGER. A letter opener.

Luke takes one of the envelopes, digs the letter opener into its corner and then SLICES it open. He pulls out the bill and skims through it.

He looks at James and shakes his head.

LUKE
How high can this gas bill go, huh?

Luke doesn't wait for a reply. He chucks the mail onto the little cupboard in the hallway.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Really can't wait for the game tonight. We've been trying to beat those suckers for a long time. I have a feeling today's the day!

Luke gives James a wide, reassuring smile.

JAMES

I hope I can actually help with a few shots.

LUKE

Don't stress about it, my friend. Just enjoy yourself. They have a great bar over there, too.

JAMES

Fun.

LUKE

We're going to head out soon. Let me just--

Luke's phone rings. He looks at the screen. Frowns.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Sorry, I need to take this.
(rolls eyes)
It's work.

JAMES

Sure.

Luke motions for James to wait in the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

James enters the living room. He straightens his collar, and brushes his hands through his hair.

He looks around the room. There are many souvenirs atop the beautiful cupboards. Memories from expensive travels.

A magnificent clock decorates the main wall. A loud TICK TOCK emits from it. 6:20 p.m.

Photos also decorate the room. Almost too many photos. Some in expensive frames on the wall, others more casual and scattered around the room. All of them are of the married couple on vacation. Except for one.

On the far side of the living room is a photo of a mother and her teenage son. The photo is old, but it has been beautifully preserved in a golden frame. Its memory is almost hidden by the other photos that surround it.

James approaches it. Picks it up.

The photo was taken in a hospital room. The mother lies in the hospital bed. Numerous machines surround her, but none are connected to her body. A single IV in her hand is the last source of medical support.

She looks very ill, but has managed to smile for the occasion. The son is too young for such courage - Luke. His handsome, young face is red and swollen from crying. He holds his mother's hand.

James is deeply moved by this memory from Luke's past. He tries to understand the story behind the photo.

WOMAN

Welcome back.

James startles.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I didn't hear you come in.

The woman walks up to James. Gently, she takes the photo from his hands and puts it back in its place.

JAMES

Sorry. I was just looking around.

WOMAN

That's quite alright.

(beat)

I heard you're going bowling with Luke?

JAMES

Yes.

WOMAN

He's been looking forward to it all day.

The woman walks back to where the sofas are. She sits on the same one as last time.

Luke enters the living room.

LUKE
I can't believe this. I am so
sorry. I have to go.

JAMES
Oh.

LUKE
Ah! This is insane. I have to go to
work. I'm so sorry James for
bringing you all the way here.

James is disappointed.

JAMES
That's ok, don't worry about it. I
completely understand.

LUKE
No, no. I can't just leave you like
this. This is so embarrassing.

JAMES
No, please. Don't stress about it
at all, it's fine. I'm sure we can
reschedule for another time.

LUKE
I'm not letting you leave without
any hospitality. This is not what
this house stands for.

JAMES
(confused)
It's... it's quite alright.

Luke looks around the room as if searching for a source of
hospitality.

Beat.

LUKE
My wife makes the best kouglof
cake. You have to try it!

JAMES
I really don't want to be a bother.

LUKE
Nonsense! It's the least I can do
after this mess.

WOMAN

Indeed.
(beat)
It's no bother at all.

She stands and walks to the kitchen.

Luke grabs James by the shoulders.

LUKE

I will make this up to you, James.

JAMES

Oh, sure. But, Luke I really don't
feel right about just staying here.
It's not proper.

LUKE

Nonsense!
(towards the kitchen)
Save some for me, darling!

Swiftly, Luke leaves the house.

James stands in the middle of the living room, alone.

A moment later, Luke's car can be heard disappearing into the
distance.

Beat.

The house is silent.

Like a small boy, James fiddles with his hands. He peeks
towards the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

A kettle is heating up on the stove.

The woman carefully cuts two slices of kouglof. She serves
them on two vintage dessert plates. Then, she prepares two
elegant, old-fashioned tea cups.

On the kitchen counter is a teapot with a generous amount of
tea leaves already inside it.

The woman arranges the pot, tea cups, and plates on a serving
tray.

Suddenly, she turns and looks at James. Almost as if to check
that he is still there. She catches him looking at her.

The kettle WHISTLES.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

James sits on the sofa. He looks as if he would rather be anywhere else but here. His posture is tight and hunched. He keeps his hands clasped on his knees, afraid to touch anything.

The woman enters the living room with the serving tray.

She serves one kouglof slice and one tea cup on each side of the coffee table. Then, she takes the tea pot and pours the tea. Heavy steam rises from the elegant tea cups.

She sits on the opposite sofa and makes herself comfortable. James watches all of this unfold. He looks at his kouglof plate and notices the tiniest fork that he has ever seen.

WOMAN

I don't cook much, but I love cakes. All kinds.

(beat)

I make them all the time. Luke is obsessed with kouglof.

JAMES

(nervous)

It does look delicious.

WOMAN

Thank you.

(motions towards the tea)

Please.

James looks at the tea cup. Everything in front of him is tiny and delicate. He looks like Alice at the tea party.

Carefully, he lifts the porcelain tea cup, and drinks. It soothes him.

JAMES

Mint?

WOMAN

Yes.

(beat)

I hope you don't mind, I never add sugar to tea. It kills the true flavor.

James shakes his head to indicate that he doesn't mind.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I'm very sorry about tonight. He gets those calls all the time.

JAMES

That's ok, really. I completely understand. We'll get together again some other time.

Hungry, James picks up his plate. He tries to eat with the freakishly small fork provided.

WOMAN

Sometimes I feel like I'm the only one living in this house. He's always out and about somewhere.

James is genuinely impressed with the kouglof. He forgets about the uncomfortable situation that he is in at the moment. He jabs the tiny fork into the cake and tries to eat faster. James hasn't practiced the same Bon Ton rules as the residents of this house.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Does your wife complain about such things?

JAMES

(full mouth)

No.

(beat)

If anything, she complains about me being home all the time.

WOMAN

Oh? What do you do?

JAMES

I'm a bookkeeper.

WOMAN

Sedentary. Not good for the spine.

JAMES

No. I try to get some exercise whenever I can. Mostly with my dog.

WOMAN

(smiling)

How cute.

JAMES

(proud)

He is.

James places his plate back on the table.

From his pocket, he takes out his wallet, and from within it a photo of Spike. Like a proud father, he shows the photo to the woman.

WOMAN
He is adorable!
(beat)
How old is he?

JAMES
In the photo, nine. But he's
actually thirteen.

James looks at the photo of Spike one more time, then carefully returns it to his wallet.

JAMES (CONT'D)
He's a grandpa now.

James drinks more tea, then returns to the kouglof. He hasn't had a proper meal all day.

The woman watches him as he enjoys the cake. She slowly nibbles at her own piece.

WOMAN
I'm glad that you're doing better.

James is confused.

JAMES
Better?

WOMAN
Than a few months ago.

Beat.

James frowns.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
You're the father that hired the
lawyers.
(beat)
And the detectives.

James freezes.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
I saw you on the news. They did a
segment on you. "The Father that
Won't Give Up", they called it.

James' expression hardens. He knows about the news segment.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
That must have cost you a fortune.
(beat)
And a lot of debt.

James doesn't respond, but his expression makes it clear that everything the woman says is true.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
They ran the segment for the entire week.
(beat)
They invited two clinical psychologists to analyze your behavior.

Rage rises from within James. His ears begin to ring. His eyes have trouble focusing on her.

The woman pokes at her kouglof. As if she doesn't notice the despair opposite her.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
They especially loved the parts when you cried. They made a whole montage of it.
(beat)
Replayed it every hour.

A DARKNESS creeps from beneath them. It makes its way across the floor. James doesn't notice it.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
Did they find out what caused the derailment?

Beat.

JAMES
(cold)
No. They didn't.

The woman nods.

WOMAN
I'm sorry for your loss.

James stares at the ground. Dejected. He suddenly looks weak.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
You're not alone.

James looks at her.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
In your loss, I mean.
(beat)
How many casualties were there in
the end?

JAMES
Thirty-seven.

WOMAN
Thirty-seven lives. Gone.

The atmosphere is different. He feels numb and disoriented.
He briefly experiences tunnel vision.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
They said you hired a medium.
(beat)
To speak with your daughter. From
the other side?

James looks embarrassed. He feels sick.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
I understand, James.
(beat)
I understand the despair.

James' mind is slowly breaking into pieces.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
You look for help in all the wrong
places, James.

He looks weak, hunched into a tiny ball of a man. Bent over
under the presence of the woman opposite him. Desperate.

The darkness has now latched onto the atmosphere around them.
It's thick and suffocating.

JAMES
I need to go.
(weak)
Thank you for your hospitality.

The woman doesn't respond.

James slowly gets up to leave. He has a difficult time
balancing on his feet. The room starts to spin.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

He walks towards the door. As he grabs the handle, two loud, pulsing sounds ring in his ears. BA-DUM. BA-DUM.

James grabs his forehead and steadies himself.

He turns around to look at the woman. She sits peacefully in the living room - watching him. His eyes turn to the magnificent clock on the wall.

The handles show 7:05 p.m. Two seconds later, the large handle moves - 7:06 p.m.

BA-DUM.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

James rushes to leave the house. He storms through their garden and towards his car. His feet weak, he holds on to a wall or a gate whenever he can.

As he opens the car door, he notices the post box of the house.

On the post box:

"LUKE AND IRNIA JONES"

James finally gets in his car, starts the engine, exits their driveway, and speeds home.

INT. HOUSE/KITCHEN - NIGHT

James stands with both hands on the kitchen counter. In front of him, an electric kettle slowly reaches boiling point. His face has a gray hue, eyes manic.

The kettle makes loud BUBBLING sounds. It makes him sick.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

James throws up into the toilet bowl. Tears stream down his face from the effort.

He flushes the toilet and moves over to the sink. He rinses his mouth and washes his face. Looks up into the mirror.

The man staring back at him is falling apart. Something has cracked inside him.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

James pours water from the kettle into a cup. The water turns black.

Above him, he opens a cabinet and takes out the medicine box. This time, he drinks the pills from the "night" section.

EMILY

James?

James turns. He didn't hear her enter the kitchen.

JAMES

Hey.

EMILY

Oh, good, you're back.

She walks over to him and gives him a quick peck on the cheek. James is surprised by the affection.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Did you have a good time? Were you out with Carl?

Emily seems different. She's actually happy to see him. Her clothes look new, her hair is nicely styled, and her face looks healthy and content. James isn't sure how to react.

JAMES

Uhhh... yes. Carl and I had a couple of drinks.

EMILY

(smiling)

Good. I'm glad you had a great evening. You deserve some time off.

Emily looks at the coffee cup.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Coffee? This late? Oh, honey. You know you can't have coffee after seven.

JAMES

I uh... I have a lot of work to do.

EMILY

You know what it does to your blood pressure.

(sigh)

Fine. Can I make you anything?

JAMES
 (surprised)
 No. I'm good. Just the coffee.

EMILY
 Alright. I'll leave you to it.

Emily walks out of the kitchen and heads upstairs. Confused, James turns towards the fridge. He opens it.

The fridge is packed with food and beverages. Fruits, vegetables, spreads, and meats. Everything he could possibly think of eating is in there. He checks the freezer below. Also packed.

He frowns. Disbelief.

EMILY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 (from somewhere upstairs)
 Don't forget! Eight P-M!

James turns.

JAMES
 (towards the stairs)
 What's at eight?

But Emily doesn't hear him. She has already closed the bedroom door.

INT. DEN - NIGHT

Slowly, James opens the door of his den. The door SQUEEKS. He walks into the den as if for the first time.

Something's off.

It's the same den, but the vibe is different. Much of the dust has cleared. The walls look brighter. The floor is vacuumed. The windows are clean, and the curtains pulled apart.

James looks at his desk. The papers are organized into neat piles. The chair is neatly tucked underneath it. Then, he notices the biggest change of all.

About half of the newspaper cutouts are gone.

James examines the wall. Many are definitely missing. Large, empty spaces are clearly visible on the wall that was once completely covered in cutouts.

James checks the trash can underneath the desk. They're not there.

He looks through the drawers, underneath the couch and among the many piles of books and comic books. Nothing.

He stands in the middle of the den, disoriented.

Then, Spike barks from the backyard. He hasn't forgotten about the walk.

JAMES

Oh, buddy. I'm so sorry.

James leaves the den.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

James and Spike walk down the street, slowly. Spike's hips are painful with every step, but nevertheless, he is excited to be on the walk. James doesn't rush him, he is lost in his own thoughts.

Spike stops at a spot in the grass and inspects it in great detail with his nose.

JAMES

Smells good?

Spike's tail is out of control. This is the most energetic that James has seen him in a long time.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Did one of your girlfriends pass by?

Spike doesn't have time for James' mockery. Females were here. This is serious.

James feels for him.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I can set you up with that Schnauzer from across the street. She's kinda feisty.

Spike isn't impressed with the offer.

JAMES (CONT'D)

No, huh?

(beat)

Ah, it's probably for the best, mate. She'd break your heart.

James' phone rings. He fiddles for it through his pocket, then takes it out and checks the screen.

His face drops. Stunned, James stares at the screen.

On the screen: HELEN

James cannot move. He stares at the name as the phone continues to ring. His hand shakes. This cannot be real.

Slowly, he taps the green button and brings the phone to his ear.

JAMES (CONT'D)

(beat)

Hello?

HELEN

Oh my God, dad! Where are you? I told you the gifts were edible, some of them are melting!

BA-DUM.

James cannot bring his mind to comprehend the situation.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Dad?!

JAMES

(weak)

Yes?

HELEN

Are you coming to get me?

James checks his watch - 8:17 p.m.

JAMES

Y-Yes. Yes! I'm on my way.

HELEN

Alright, well hurry up!

(cheerful)

See you soon!

Helen hangs up.

James puts the phone back in his pocket. He turns on his heels and runs home.

The leash immediately tightens. Spike cannot run home.

Out of his mind, James manages to pick Spike up into his arms. With the heavy dog in his hands, he runs home as fast as he can.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

James hurries to his parked car, with a confused dog bouncing in his hands. James opens the back door and puts Spike inside. The dog was not prepared for this adventure.

James gets in the driver's seat, hears the engine roar, and bursts out of his driveway and down the road.

Spike releases a little yelp.

EXT. TRAIN STATION/PARKING LOT - NIGHT

James parks the car like a mad man, bursts out of the car and runs towards the train station. Spike decides to stay in the car.

INT./EXT. TRAIN STATION/PLATFORM - NIGHT

James enters the train station and sees the parked train.

On the front of the train:

"PHOENIX EXPRESS 1843"

James turns left and right. There are PEOPLE on the platform. Some rush past him and bump into him. Others stand in groups in front of him, blocking his view. James pushes past them, then sees her.

Helen sits on a bench, surrounded by gift bags.

Slowly, James approaches the bench. He comes very close to her, but doesn't dare call her name for fear that she might disappear.

Finally, she sees him.

HELEN

Dad!

She gets up and runs over to give him a hug.

HELEN (CONT'D)

You forgot me, didn't you?

James doesn't respond, and doesn't let go of her either. His eyes look insane. None of this makes any sense to him.

Helen breaks free from the hug and gives him a light punch on the arm.

HELEN (CONT'D)
 (points at the gift bags
 on the bench)
 They're MEL-TING! C'mon let's go.

Helen picks up her bags and heads towards the parking lot. James cannot move yet.

EXT. TRAIN STATION/PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Helen comes out of the train station while James tags along behind her. She notices the way he parked the car.

HELEN
 Maybe keep it between the lines
 next time, dad.

Then, she sees Spike in the back seat.

HELEN (CONT'D)
 (excited)
 You brought Spike?
 (to the dog)
 Hey, boy!

Helen and Spike greet each other for a few moments. Then, Helen opens the trunk and carefully places the gift bags inside. She makes her way to the other side of the car and sits in the passenger seat.

HELEN (CONT'D)
 Come on, dad!

James, dazed, gets into his car.

HELEN (CONT'D)
 Listen, I got you one of those
 deep-fried ice creams with extra
 chocolate syrup.
 (beat)
 By now it's probably deep-fried
 goo.

James just stares at her in disbelief. Helen notices that he isn't his usual self.

HELEN (CONT'D)
You look a little pale. Want me to
drive?

James finally relaxes a little - barely.

JAMES
No, it's ok. Let's go.

James starts the car, carefully pulls out of the parking
space, and drives home.

INT. HOUSE/HALLWAY - NIGHT

Helen enters the house. James follows with the gift bags.

HELEN
Mom! I'm home!

EMILY (O.S.)
(from the kitchen)
Honey!

Emily enters the hallway and embraces her daughter.

EMILY (CONT'D)
Oh, I missed you! Did you have a
good trip?

HELEN
Yeah.
(teasing)
Dad forgot he had a daughter.

EMILY
(to James)
Were you late? I told you, eight
o'clock.
(back to Helen)
Oh, he never listens to me.

HELEN
Mom, quick. Put these in the
freezer.

Helen takes the bags from James and rushes to the kitchen.
Emily follows.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mother and daughter sift through the edible gifts. Emily takes out other frozen foods to make room in the packed freezer.

HELEN
Where's Nick?

EMILY
He's coming here straight from work. He'll be here soon.

HELEN
Dad said we could order pizza.

EMILY
What? I have stew!

Mother and daughter organize the last few gifts.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

James watches all of this from the entrance door. He sweats. He feels sick. The room starts to spin. He faints.

INT. DEN - DAY

James opens his eyes.

His vision is blurry.

As the room comes into focus, he looks around. He lies on his couch. Someone has covered him with a blanket.

He looks at the ceiling. The crack is gone.

He sits up and holds his head still for a moment. He has a horrible headache.

Everything seems quiet.

Slowly, he gets up to leave the room. As he moves past his desk, he stops. Looks behind him.

The wall above his desk is completely empty.

James stands in front of it. Stares.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Emily and Nick are at the kitchen table. In front of them, a huge breakfast layout. Eggs, pancakes, cereal, juice, milk, and a coffee pot.

James enters the kitchen.

EMILY

James!

She gets up from her chair and comes over to give James a kiss.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Are you feeling better?

JAMES

What happened?

EMILY

You passed out. Is it the blood pressure again? You need to see the doctor.

JAMES

No. It's ok. I'll be fine.

NICK

(smiling)

Hey, dad.

Nick wears a beautiful business suit. His hair is carefully styled with gel.

JAMES

Hey.

NICK

Mum being dramatic as usual. But she's right, dad. You need to take it easy.

EMILY

Cut it out with those long hours, James. You'll work yourself to death.

NICK

You can't work so much dad, it's not good for you.

JAMES
I'm sorry. I'll take better care of
myself.

EMILY
Please do.

She goes back to her breakfast seat.

James watches his family. Something has obviously changed,
although they don't seem to realize it at all.

EMILY (CONT'D)
(to James)
Well hurry up before the pancakes
get cold. You need some good food
to fix you up.

James takes his usual seat at the table. Then, he notices it.
A fourth plate is on the table, ready to be used. James
stares at it.

Emily notices that James looks confused. She takes his plate
to arrange his breakfast. Three pancakes with a side of
bacon, all topped with maple syrup. She then pours him a
glass of orange juice.

EMILY (CONT'D)
Eat up. There's plenty more.
(sternly)
Ease up on the cigarettes, James.

James nods.

EMILY (CONT'D)
(to Nick)
I am so proud of you, honey. I knew
you could do it!

NICK
Mom, stop it. The way you say that
is embarrassing.

JAMES
What's going on?

NICK
(excited)
We have a new investor!

JAMES
Investor?

NICK

For the solar panels. This guy is a professional, and has like ten years of experience in the field. He says that he sees a great future for us at SOLAR L-T-D. I'm so excited.

James tries to adapt to this new situation.

JAMES

That's great to hear, son. Really.

NICK

(smiling)

Thanks, dad. Eat up!

James eats the delicious breakfast in front of him, still a little confused.

Soon, footsteps approach the kitchen.

A very sleepy Helen enters the kitchen, then gives her father a kiss on the head. James watches her, stunned. Yesterday actually happened.

HELEN

Dad, are you feeling better?

EMILY

He missed his pills again.

HELEN

Dad! Be careful.

JAMES

I'm sorry. I'll remember next time.

Helen shakes her head, then takes her own seat at the table.

NICK

(to Helen)

How's college?

Helen immediately reaches for the pancakes.

HELEN

Good. Two more exams and I'm done with this semester. Can't wait!

EMILY

Will you come see us more often when you're done.

HELEN
Of course, mum.

NICK
(teasing)
I'd rather she didn't. I'm always
short on money when she's around.

HELEN
(full mouth)
You have plenty to spare.

James watches them. The family that he used to have is back,
as if nothing bad had ever happened. He missed them.

Emily is the first to finish her breakfast, although Nick and
Helen are not far behind. Only James is much slower than
usual today.

EMILY
(to James)
Honey, I'm going to need a few
things from the store. And Spike is
running out of vitamins. Would you
mind going to get a few things?

JAMES
Sure, I'll go get them.

EMILY
Great!
(to Nick and Helen)
Make sure that you're both here by
five. We're visiting your aunt
today.

Nick and Helen are not excited.

NICK
Didn't we go like two months ago?

HELEN
Feels like yesterday.

EMILY
Stop it, you two. We leave at four-
thirty.

Helen and Nick exchange glances.

HELEN
Alright. I'm off. See you people
later.

Helen picks up her plate and adds it to the pile in the sink.

NICK
Me, too. I have a meeting before we
leave.

Nick also takes his plate to the sink.

EMILY
Be back on time!

NICK
Will do.

HELEN
K.

Helen turns to her father before she leaves the kitchen.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Dad.

JAMES
Yes?

HELEN
Medicine.

JAMES
I promise.

Everyone goes off on their own errands.

James is alone at the table again. This time, he looks happy.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

James pushes a loaded cart. He stops in front of a mountain of different fabric softeners. He looks down at the long grocery list in his hands, and tries to figure out which one he was asked to buy.

Someone approaches from behind.

LUKE
May I suggest one?

JAMES
(surprised)
Hey.

LUKE
Sorry, didn't mean to scare you.
You looked a little lost, that's
all.

JAMES
I'm fine.

Luke senses the tension.

LUKE
Listen. I really am sorry about
leaving you like that.
(beat)
Did you like the kouglof?

JAMES
Yes.

Luke nods. He can see that James is in no mood to talk to him.

LUKE
I guess I'll see you around, huh?

JAMES
Yeah.

Luke leaves. James is alone again.

EXT. SUPERMARKET PARKING LOT - DAY

James walks to his car with a dozen bags and a massive bag of dog food. He opens the trunk.

A few cars away from him, a FATHER and his two SONS, 4 and 8, stand next to their own trunk. The 4-year-old sobs loudly. The father screams at him.

FATHER
Enough!

This frightens the 4-year-old even more. He cries louder.

FATHER (CONT'D)
Shut the fuck up and get in the
car!

The father slams the trunk.

The 8-year-old looks terrified, eyes full of tears. He opens the car door by himself and tries to help his little brother climb into the car.

The 8-year-old catches James' shaken stare. The boy desperately tries to speed up before the father is even more furious. Too late.

FATHER (CONT'D)

I said, get the fuck in!

The father shoves both children into the backseat.

James walks towards the vehicle in a weak attempt to help. But before he can reach them, the father is already in the driver's seat. They speed off.

James watches the car disappear.

EXT. HOUSE/DRIVEWAY - DAY

Absent-mindedly, James takes out the groceries from the trunk of his car. The two boys are still heavy on his mind.

INT. HOUSE/HALLWAY - DAY

James enters the house with the groceries.

He drops them on the floor, exhausted. He looks around for any family members. The house is quiet.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

James puts the grocery bags on the kitchen table. He starts to empty the bags and arranges the groceries into their correct cabinets and drawers.

From somewhere in the house, he hears a woman crying.

He moves towards the sound. It gets louder.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

In the living room are Emily and Nick. Emily sobs uncontrollably, while Nick tries to comfort her. They both wear black.

Nick sees James in the door frame - dumbfounded.

NICK

Dad.

He walks over to his father and hugs him. Nick's eyes are red and swollen. He looks at James' clothes.

NICK (CONT'D)
You have to get ready. I left the
clothes in your room.

James doesn't understand. Nick goes back to his mother.

Then, he sees it.

On the table in the living room is a large, framed photo of Helen. On the corner of the frame is a black ribbon. Helen smiles in her beautiful portrait photo.

JAMES
(to himself)
No.

Helen's funeral is today.

INT. DEN - DAY

James enters the room. On the couch are a set of black clothes. A suit, a shirt, and a tie. All black.

James approaches the clothes on the couch. He studies them for a moment. Then, he turns to look at the wall above his desk.

A single newspaper cutout hangs on the wall.

It reads:

"TRAGEDY STRIKES SMALL TOWN: Derailed train leaves at least
26 dead and 51 injured. Cause of derailment unknown."

He hears a car park in his driveway. He approaches the window.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Carl and his wife, TABITHA, 50, get out of their car. They look devastated. Tabitha holds a large, crumpled tissue in her hand.

The couple now approach the front door. The bell RINGS.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

James opens the door. Tabitha breaks down as soon as she sees him.

TABITHA

(crying)

Oh, James. I'm so sorry. I'm so so
sorry. Oh!

She hugs James and continues to cry on his shoulder. Carl watches, lost for words. His eyes are also red.

CARL

Mate... I'm so sorry.

Carl grabs James' shoulder, as Tabitha continues to cry into the other one.

Slowly, she pulls away.

TABITHA

Where's Emily?

She doesn't wait for him to answer. She goes inside to look for her.

CARL

What do you need help with?

James' worst nightmare is coming true. Again.

JAMES

Emily. Can you, uh... please check
on Emily and Nick for me?

CARL

Of course.

Carl does as he is asked.

James stares at the ground. His shock slowly turns into rage. He looks up.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

James gets in his car, slams the door, and speeds off.

EXT. LUXURIOUS HOUSE - DAY

James is furious.

He rings the doorbell many times and pounds on the door. After what seems like an eternity, the door opens. Irnia is on the other side.

IRNIA

James! How nice to see you again.

James doesn't wait for an invitation.

INT. LUXURIOUS HOUSE/HALLWAY - DAY

James bursts into her house. Irnia doesn't stop him, but she does move back to create some distance between herself and his rage.

JAMES

What did you do?

IRNIA

Huh?

JAMES

WHAT. DID. YOU. DO?

Irnia tilts her head, almost confused.

Her long black hair falls across her shoulders in waves. She wears a simple, long dress.

She turns towards the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Irnia sits in her usual place. James stands in front of her, but doesn't take his old seat.

JAMES

(furious)

Answer.

IRNIA

I don't know why you're so confused, James. I helped you.

Beat.

JAMES

And then took her away again.

IRNIA

Oh? I guess it's time for more tea.

Irnia stands.

JAMES

What?

She moves towards the kitchen. James follows her.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

IRNIA
(calmly)
The tea is an important part of
this process, James.

JAMES
The tea?

IRNIA
Yes. A special brew. You won't find
this in a shop.

James stands behind her while she prepares a new pot of tea.
She turns to look at him.

IRNIA (CONT'D)
You're welcome by the way.

JAMES
What's in it? What's in the tea?

IRNIA
(beat)
Does it matter? If it brings her
back, does it matter?

James doesn't respond.

Irnia takes the two cups of tea, brushes past James and
carries them to the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Irnia places one tea cup on either side of the coffee table,
then takes her seat. James sits opposite her.

JAMES
How did you do it?
(beat)
How did you bring Helen back?

IRNIA
I told you, the tea does it. I am
merely the brewer in this.

Beat.

JAMES
Who are you?

IRNIA
I'm just a housewife.
(beat)
With very good tea.

Beat.

JAMES
What's the deal?

IRNIA
There's no deal.

James begins to lose his patience.

JAMES
Your tea wore off. So, what's the deal?

IRNIA
It's not a tight contract, James.
You stop by for tea every few days,
and the tea does the work.

Beat.

JAMES
Or?

IRNIA
Or, we go our separate ways.
(beat)
And you return to the funeral.

James watches her, furious.

IRNIA (CONT'D)
I don't see why you're so angry,
James. I gave you what you wanted.
(beat)
You can have her back. Her.
Everything.

Beat.

JAMES
I didn't ask for it.

Irnia studies his eyes.

IRNIA
Yes. You did.

James looks at the tea cups. The mint tea steams beneath him.

IRNIA (CONT'D)
It's your call, James.

Beat.

James picks up the tea cup and downs the whole thing.

He storms out of the house, and SLAMS the door behind him.

INT. HOUSE/HALLWAY - DAY

James enters his home. The house is quiet. He moves through the hallway and towards the kitchen. He looks worried.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

He enters the kitchen and sees Emily. She looks through his groceries. She notices him. Looks around.

EMILY
Where did you run off to? You can't just leave yogurt at room temperature for this long. You know it will go bad.

Emily wears her usual clothes.

JAMES
Sorry. I forgot something.
(beat)
Where's Helen?

EMILY
At her friend's house.

JAMES
Nick?

EMILY
Running a few errands before we leave to visit your sister.

Emily eyes him suspiciously.

EMILY (CONT'D)
You okay?

JAMES
Yes. Why do you ask?

EMILY
You look a little pale. Please
don't skip your medicine.

JAMES
I won't.

James heads to one of the cabinets next to Emily and takes out some vitamin C powder. He mixes it in a glass of water, and shows it off to Emily.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Look. Extra healthy.

She smirks at him, but seems pleased.

EMILY
(gestures to the kitchen
door)
Out. I'm making croissants.

JAMES
Yum!

For the first time in a very long time, he gives his wife a little peck on the lips. A clumsy one.

EMILY
Oh, look! He's a real boy!

James smiles and leaves the kitchen.

INT. DEN - DAY

James enters the room with the vitamin C glass. He moves over to the closed window, and casually looks outside as he sips his drink.

Across the road, the neighbor mows the lawn. Or rather, he tries to.

The lawn mower gives him a hard time. The blades get tangled in the grass, and the machine shuts down every time. This makes the neighbor very angry. He kicks the lawn mower.

James watches as the neighbor's wife comes out of the house, holding a phone. James can't hear them.

She extends the phone towards her husband and tries to get him to talk to someone on the other end of the line.

The neighbor shouts at her. He points at the lawn mower, then points at her, then at the house. She shouts something back. This makes him even angrier.

Furious, he moves towards her, extends his hand, and slaps her.

James frowns.

The woman runs back to the house, holding her cheek.

James moves away from the window.

He sits on the couch and sips on the drink. The house is quiet. James looks around the room, something bugs him.

He finishes his drink and lies down on the couch. He looks up at the ceiling. A small crack has formed again. It annoys him. He looks angry.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

James searches through the many tools, buckets, and boxes in his garage. Finally, he finds it - a small pot of white paint. A small brush is secured onto the lid.

INT. DEN - DAY

James stands on his desk chair, pot and brush in each hand. He dips the brush into the paint and carefully rubs off the excess. He raises the brush above his head and paints over the small crack in the ceiling.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

James watches TV.

Helen and Nick enter the house together. James turns to look at his children. Helen enters the living room first and kisses her dad on the top of his head. Nick opts for a high-five.

HELEN
(towards the kitchen)
What smells good, mum?

EMILY (O.S.)
(from the kitchen)
Croissants!

Helen makes a face of delight.

NICK
 (to Helen)
 I'm sure your thighs are just as
 happy.

HELEN
 As is your ass.

JAMES
 (teasing)
 Stop. I will eat all of them to
 save you both.

HELEN
 Ha! You wish!

EMILY (O.S.)
 (from the kitchen)
 You're each getting one. I'm taking
 the rest to your aunt's house.

NICK
 What? Why?

HELEN
 They've been competing in the
 pastry department for years, Nick.

Nick looks to James for support. James lifts his hands like,
 "I'm not getting involved."

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

The whole family gets out of the car that James has just
 parked.

HELEN
 All of them. They ate all the
 croissants, mum.

EMILY
 (delighted with herself)
 Yes. But I won.

HELEN
 Congratulations. The rest of us
 lost sixteen croissants.

EMILY
 Oh, shush. I'll make a new batch
 for you.

HELEN

It takes seventy-two hours!

Emily, Nick, and Helen enter the house while James locks the car. He hears Spike bark from the backyard.

James reaches the edge of the house and peeks to look at Spike.

JAMES

(to Spike)

Give me two minutes.

Spike wags his tail.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

James and Spike walk down the street. Spike sniffs everything in sight. The dog stops to mark his territory on a nearby tree.

JAMES

That's right, buddy. You show them who's boss around here.

Their search for intriguing smells continues.

In front of them, James notices a shadow. The figure is tall, and walks with elegant steps. Almost hovers above the pavement. James slows his pace and waits for the figure to walk under a street light. It's Luke.

Luke walks towards them with his head down, staring at the ground.

When he comes closer, he notices James. A smile spreads across his face.

LUKE

James! It's so good to see you again!

James isn't excited to see Luke again.

LUKE (CONT'D)

You look good! Look at you. Fresh shirt, nice shoes, your belt isn't all cracked. How've you been?

JAMES

I've been good. Things are... looking better.

LUKE
Yeah? I'm glad to hear that.

Spike shows up next to Luke's leg and sniffs him.

LUKE (CONT'D)
Hey, boy!

Luke crouches next to the dog and plays with him. Spike is delighted to be scratched by anyone.

LUKE (CONT'D)
Who's a good boy? Yes, you are.
Yes, you are!
(beat)
What's his name?

JAMES
Spike.

LUKE
Hey, Spike!
(beat)
You're a bit of a grandpa.
(to James)
How old is he?

JAMES
Thirteen.

LUKE
(to Spike)
Wow. You've been around for a
while, huh?

He plays with Spike a little more. Then stands.

LUKE (CONT'D)
You two must have quite a history
together.

JAMES
Yeah.

Gently, James pulls Spike back towards him.

LUKE
Wish we could have a dog. Irnia
isn't fond of the shedding.

James doesn't respond.

LUKE (CONT'D)
 Hey, there's a new bowling game on
 Friday. Want to come? Promise I
 won't rush off to work this time.

JAMES
 I uhm... I have a busy week this
 week.

LUKE
 Oh, yeah. Don't worry about it.
 (beat)
 I guess I'll see you around, huh?

JAMES
 Guess so.

Luke gives Spike a little wave, passes them, and disappears
 into the shadows.

INT. LUXURIOUS HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - DAY

James and Irnia sit at their usual places opposite one
 another. The two cups of tea cool in front of them. There is
 no one else in the house.

IRNIA
 James, how have you been?

James just nods.

IRNIA (CONT'D)
 You're not happy?

JAMES
 I am.

Irnia looks disappointed in him. She frowns.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 (panics)
 I am!
 (beat)
 I am.

Beat.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 Thank you.

She finally smiles a little.

IRINA
Your tea is ready.

James stares at the tea cup.

Beat.

JAMES
Is this the past?

IRNIA
Now? No.
(beat)
This is whatever time is. It just
moves along. With or without us.

James stares at the golden hue of the mint tea in his cup.

JAMES
What about the funeral? I've
already been to that funeral. Why
was it happening again?

Irnia thinks about this for a while. Almost exaggerates how
hard she has to think about it.

IRNIA
I don't know.

James doesn't believe her.

IRNIA (CONT'D)
I suppose it's when your despair
was born. For your daughter.

James fiddles with the tea cup.

IRNIA (CONT'D)
You've saved them all, James.

James doesn't understand.

JAMES
Huh?

IRNIA
The train never derailed.

James nods. He understands now.

JAMES
Right.

Irnia sets her empty tea cup back on the plate.

IRNIA

Thank you for your company.

James picks up his tea cup, and drinks.

INT. HOUSE/DEN - DAY

James is at his desk, with a pile of work papers in front of him. He is not in a good mood.

His phone rings. It's Helen.

JAMES

Hi, honey.

HELEN

Hey, dad. Am I interrupting?

JAMES

No, no. Go ahead.

HELEN

Good! I passed!

JAMES

Oh, congratulations! I had no doubt that you would.

HELEN

(excited)

The semester is finally over!

JAMES

When are you coming home to celebrate?

HELEN

Soon. I'll let you know in advance. I need to finish up a few things here with administration. Don't tell mum, I'm going to call her now.

JAMES

OK.

HELEN

Hey, dad. Can you do me a favor?

JAMES

Sure.

HELEN

I forgot my library books in my room. I have to return them. Could you send them over here to me?

JAMES

Sure, honey. I'll send them on the train.

HELEN

Great! Thanks, dad! I'll pick them up from the station here tonight.

JAMES

OK, honey. Can't wait to see you.

HELEN

Me too. Speak soon!

She hangs up the phone.

James looks weak. He holds his head with both hands above the desk. He starts to sweat.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

James enters the bathroom. He splashes his face with cold water a few times. He looks in the mirror. His eyes are red and his capillaries are clearly visible.

He feels sick. He rushes to the toilet and throws up.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

James carries a box of Helen's library books to the car. He puts the box on the passenger seat.

He gets in the car, starts it, and drives off.

INT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

James stands in line at the train station ticket booths. He holds the box in his hands.

The train station is busy. PASSENGERS haul their luggage across the station. People welcome each other. Some say their goodbyes.

Trains are parked on the tracks outside. Ready to leave.

WOMAN AT THE TICKET BOOTH

Next!

James approaches the booth with his box.

JAMES

Hello. I'd like to send this box to
Arlington University Station,
please. My daughter will pick it
up.

WOMAN AT THE TICKET BOOTH

Are you paying for the service or
is she?

JAMES

I'm paying.

WOMAN AT THE TICKET BOOTH

Twelve-ninety-nine, please.

James reaches for his wallet and takes out a twenty-dollar
bill.

WOMAN AT THE TICKET BOOTH (CONT'D)

1843 leaves in thirty minutes. Is
that one good?

JAMES

Yes, that's fine.

The woman prints a label and sticks it on the box. She then
prepares the change and tears the receipt.

WOMAN AT THE TICKET BOOTH

Here you go.

JAMES

Thank you.

James puts the change in his wallet, then heads outside.
Then, he notices the parked train.

EXT. TRAIN STATION/PLATFORM - DAY

A large, red train is parked on the platform.

People go in and out of it as they prepare for the train to
leave.

James walks to the front of the train. He looks at it,
carefully.

The train's name is clearly visible in digital, yellow letters:

"PHOENIX EXPRESS 1843"

James stares at it.

On the platform side of the train, CONDUCTORS and STATION STAFF help passengers with their tickets and their luggage.

One conductor catches his attention. Tall, slim, elegant. The conductor wears a hat that covers most of his face, but James can see the profile - Luke?

James is certain that it's him.

He moves forward to check. He needs to see if this is really Luke. He works here?

The crowd of passengers slows him down. He bumps into them as he tries to get closer to the figure.

The conductor boards the train.

James follows him, and enters the train through the same wagon. He looks around but he cannot see him. The conductor is gone.

James walks through the wagon with no luck. He's gone.

James stops in the middle of a crowded wagon and stares ahead.

EXT. STREET - DAY

James and Spike are in the midst of their daily walk. Spike takes his time with every tree, head down and excited. James walks next to him - lost in thought.

A MOTHER, 30s, and her young CHILD, girl, 4, appear behind them. They are faster than James and Spike, and seem to be in a hurry.

The mother holds her daughter's hand, and in the other hand a mobile phone. She frowns at the screen as she tries to figure something out.

As they pass by, the child notices Spike.

CHILD
Doggy! Mum, can I touch him?

MOTHER

No, sweetheart. We're late.

CHILD

Pleeease.

The mother looks at James for approval.

JAMES

Sure, go ahead. He loves kids.

MOTHER

Thank you.

The girl strokes Spike's head. Spike loves it. He sniffs her face.

CHILD

Tee hee hee. That tickles.

MOTHER

Come on. You'll be late for the party.

CHILD

(to Spike)

Bye.

(to James)

Bye Bye!

JAMES

(weak smile)

Bye bye.

Mother and child hurry on ahead in front of them.

Spike stops to examine another tree in what looks like an endless line of trees on this street.

JAMES (CONT'D)

(to Spike)

Just out of curiosity, do you think we could make it back by dinner? I'm starving. Aren't you?

Spike has no intention of speeding up anything. James allows it.

JAMES (CONT'D)

(to spike)

You missed a spot.

(points)

There. You didn't sniff there.

A VAN passes them.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 (to Spike)
 Did the poodle come here? You have
 a thing for poodles, don't you?

Spike is super excited.

James looks up. The mother and child are a long way away.

The mother looks at her phone, then at the houses around her.

The child is crouched next to one of the trees by the street.
 She picks tiny flowers that grow around the base of the tree.

The van slows down.

BA-DUM.

James watches as the side door of the van slowly slides open.
 A MAN comes half-way out of the moving vehicle. He extends a
 hand.

In the moment when the van is parallel to the child, the man
 grabs a full hand of the child's clothes, and easily throws
 her into the vehicle.

The mother turns too late.

MOTHER
 No!

The vehicle speeds away.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
 No!!! Please! No!!!

James drops Spike's leash and reaches for his phone.

The mother desperately runs in the van's direction, but the
 vehicle has already disappeared in the distance.

James dials 911 as he runs towards the mother.

OPERATOR (O.S.)
 Nine-one-one. What is your
 emergency?

JAMES
 (into the phone)
 A child has been kidnapped! I just
 saw it!

OPERATOR (O.S.)
What is your location?

James looks at the number on the house that he is running by.

JAMES
(into the phone)
Hikley Street! Number one-four-
three-eight!

OPERATOR (O.S.)
Tell me exactly what happened.

JAMES
(into the phone -
breathless)
She was playing by the street. The
child. Girl. A van just appeared
out of nowhere and a man from the
van grabbed her. Threw her inside.
Then sped off.

James still runs towards the mother.

The woman is on her knees in the middle of the road.
Screaming.

OPERATOR (O.S.)
Do you have a license plate number?

JAMES
(into the phone)
No!

OPERATOR (O.S.)
Can you describe the vehicle?

JAMES
(into the phone)
A large van. Brown. Old. I didn't
see anything written on the van.
Old. Dark and old.

OPERATOR (O.S.)
Which way did the van go?

JAMES
(into the phone)
East. I don't see it anymore.

OPERATOR (O.S.)
Sir, emergency services are on
their way to your location. Please
stay on the line.

A few PEOPLE come out of their houses.

MOTHER
Help! Please! Oh God!

James finally reaches the woman while still on the line with the operator.

JAMES
(to mother)
The police are coming! I called
nine-one-one!

The mother looks at him but there is nothing but deathly fear on her face. It isn't clear if she understood him.

OPERATOR (O.S.)
Sir, do you see the police?

James looks around him.

JAMES
(into the phone)
Not yet.

OPERATOR (O.S.)
Let me know when you see them.

More and more people come out of their houses. The mother's screams echo across the neighborhood. Some people try to approach her. Others take out their own phones and dial a number - or take a photo.

Police sirens can now be heard.

James sees them. One police car speeds off in the direction where the van went. The other police car stops next to them and two officers exit the vehicle.

OPERATOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Sir, have the police arrived?

JAMES
(into the phone)
Yes.

OPERATOR (O.S.)
They will take it from here. Do you
require any further assistance?

JAMES
(into the phone)
No. Thank you.

OPERATOR (O.S.)
Thank you. You may hang up now.

James hangs up the phone.

Around him - chaos.

The mother's worst nightmare unfolds inside her.

People from the neighborhood have formed a circle around her.
The police begin their investigation.

INT. DEN - NIGHT

James lies on his couch. The shock of the kidnapping stains his face.

He stares at the ceiling.

The fresh coat of white paint that he made has now dried. It looks much lighter than the rest of the ceiling.

James hears a CRACKLING sound.

Beneath the fresh paint, a new crack appears. Slowly. Its thin lines wiggle like worms across about four inches of the ceiling.

James fears it.

INT. LUXURIOUS HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - DAY

James and Irnia are in their usual seats. James looks worse. Irnia looks better.

JAMES
Did you hear about the little girl?

IRNIA
Oh, yes. How horrible. I feel so sorry for the mother.

Irnia sips her tea. James hasn't touched his yet.

JAMES
(weak)
They got away.

IRNIA
I'm sure they'll catch them eventually.

James stares daggers at her. She notices.

IRNIA (CONT'D)

James. Horrible things happen to people every day. Every. Day. You just happened to witness one.

James feels sick. Irnia puts down her empty tea cup.

IRNIA (CONT'D)

Your tea is ready.

James looks at the tea cup.

INT. HOUSE/DEN - DAY

James lies on the couch. He looks possessed.

He is dressed up. A new suit. His hair slicked to the side.

He has lost a lot of weight.

He stares at the crack on the ceiling. As he watches it, the crack expands in length. CRACKLING.

James is hypnotized by the tiny motions.

A car parks in his driveway. Then another car. Many voices greet each other outside.

EMILY (O.S.)

(from somewhere in the house)

James! They're here!

James blinks.

He sits on his couch and rubs his forehead. He takes a deep breath.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Emily, Nick, Helen, Carl, and Tabitha are all gathered in the living room. There are presents everywhere. Drinks and snacks cover the living room table.

James enters the room.

TABITHA

Happy birthday!

James tries to smile.

They suffocate him with congratulations and hugs. Then drag him over to the sofa and sit him down.

NICK
Happy birthday, dad!

HELEN
Yey, dad!

EMILY
(to Helen)
Go get the glasses.

Helen leaves.

TABITHA
(to Emily)
I'll help you with the snacks. Oh, you made the pretzels!

EMILY
(to Tabitha)
New recipe. I added flavored salt on top.

TABITHA
(to Emily)
Ooooh!

HELEN (O.S.)
(from the kitchen)
I can't reach!

EMILY
(to Nick)
Go help your sister.

Nick leaves.

James is on the sofa. Dazed. He has trouble hearing anyone. His ears ring. To him, everything looks as if it's happening underwater.

CARL
James. James? Are you alright?

JAMES
Huh?

The others are scattered across the house. Prepping food and arranging presents.

Emily and Tabitha also go to the kitchen. James and Carl are alone in the living room.

CARL
Are you ok?

James looks at his friend. A sudden urge to tell him everything rises. James suppresses it. He feels sick.

JAMES
I don't feel very well.

CARL
Do you want me to take you to a doctor?

Beat.

JAMES
No. It's alright. It's just my stomach. I've been feeling kind of sick lately. Nothing serious.

Carl scans James' appearance.

CARL
Did you eat out recently?

JAMES
No. Why?

CARL
One of my work mates got food poisoning from that diner at the corner. The one with the cheese hot dogs. I know you go there sometimes.

James stares at Carl. Something dawns on him.

JAMES
No. I haven't been eating out.

CARL
Oh, good. But you should get that checked out tomorrow, just in case. Do you want Emily to make you some herbal tea?

BA-DUM.

James has gone pale.

JAMES
No. I'll get it checked out tomorrow.

Carl seems somewhat satisfied with his answer.

CARL
Alright. Well, call me if you need
a ride.

Helen, Nick, and Tabitha walk into the living room.

HELEN
Dad! Come open your presents!

One by one, they hand him their presents.

Carl and Tabitha go first. They hand him a large box. James opens it. It's a traditional, green and gold banker's lamp.

CARL
You spend a lot of time on that
desk. We thought we'd decorate it
for you.

TABITHA
Do you like it?

JAMES
Yes. It's great, thank you.

Nick is next. His present is thin and long.

James opens the present to discover a beautiful fountain pen.

JAMES (CONT'D)
It's beautiful Nick, thank you. You
shouldn't have spent so much.

NICK
(pleased)
It's nothing, dad.

HELEN
Mine next!

Helen hands him a colorful present, that's obviously a book. James opens it and looks at the cover.

It reads:

"HERACLITUS

FRAGMENTS"

JAMES

Thank you, Helen.

HELEN

I know you've probably read it
before, but this is a new edition.
For your Greek philosophy
collection.

JAMES

I love it.

He gives his daughter a kiss on the top of her head.

Emily walks in with a massive cake. Two candles burn on top.
She places the cake on the table in front of James. The
candles form a 61.

All together, they start to sing.

EVERYONE

Happy birthday to you...

James watches the two candles burn. The fire reflects in his
eyes. The song echoes in his ears.

It doesn't sound like the song that he has heard sixty times
before. This time, it sounds gothic. When it comes to an end,
James pauses for a moment, then blows out the candles.

INT. LUXURIOUS HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - DAY

James and Irnia are back in the living room. The two cups of
tea are in their usual place.

James has lost even more weight. He stares at her with a mix
of fear and hatred. He almost looks smaller than her. She
looks impeccable.

A heavy silence surrounds them.

JAMES

(scared)

You're poisoning me.

Irnia doesn't respond.

JAMES (CONT'D)

(with a little more
courage)

You're poisoning me.

IRNIA

We all belong to the same life,
James. You. Me. Everyone. To the
Uroboros. To a whole.

(beat)

Some of us just know a little more
about it than others.

(beat)

We play with it, but it is stronger
than us. We cannot escape it. We
all have a beginning. And an end.

(beat)

You are one of the lucky ones. You
got to choose part of it. Millions
would die for a chance to be in
your shoes.

James looks weak. Faint.

IRNIA (CONT'D)

You did the right thing.

She leans across the table and cups his cheek.

IRNIA (CONT'D)

You're a good father, James.

James remains frozen. A mouse paralyzed by a snake's venom.

EXT. HOUSE/DRIVEWAY - DAY

James parks the car in front of his house and shuts down the
engine. He remains seated behind the wheel, staring into
empty space.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

From a hook on the wall, James takes Spike's leash.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

James enters the backyard. Dazed and weak.

He extends the leash in his hand to grab the end with the
little hook.

JAMES

Let's go, Spike.

James looks up at Spike's dog house. The black Labrador is
lying sideways on the ground. He doesn't move.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Spike? Spike!

James runs to the dog and inspects him. Spike is motionless, but he is just barely breathing. The dog's eyes are half open, but the animal is not focusing on anything. Spike is dying.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Spike! C'mon, boy. Come on!

James lifts the dog from the ground.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Panicking, James carries the dog to his car. He manages to open the car door. Gently, he lays Spike on the back seat.

JAMES
It's ok, buddy. It's ok. You're gonna be ok.

Spike is helpless in the back seat.

James is shaking. He barely manages to place the key in the ignition.

JAMES (CONT'D)
It's gonna be ok.

He turns the key. CLICK CLICK CLICK.

BA-DUM.

James is beside himself. He tries again. The engine doesn't respond at all this time.

He looks at the hood of the car in front of him. The battery.

JAMES (CONT'D)
No.

Emily comes out of the house. She has heard the commotion outside.

EMILY
James, what is going on?

JAMES
It's Spike! He's dying!

EMILY
Spike?

JAMES

Call a taxi! Call them! Tell them
it's for a dog!

Emily goes back inside the house.

James goes to the back seat next to Spike. Crying, he strokes
his old friend.

JAMES (CONT'D)

It's gonna be ok. It's gonna be ok.

Spike doesn't respond.

INT. VETERINARY CLINIC - NIGHT

James sits on a chair in the waiting room. He stares at the
ground. Around him are a few other PEOPLE. Some have PETS in
their lap, some don't.

James looks like nothing more than the ghost of a man.

A NURSE walks out of one of the rooms. She approaches James.

NURSE

The doctor will see you now.

INT. VET'S OFFICE - NIGHT

VET

He has a large tumor in his
abdomen. It's been there for
awhile.

James just nods, weakly. He still stares at the floor.

VET (CONT'D)

This is not uncommon for his age.
There isn't much that we can do I'm
afraid. A surgery would only make
it worse.

James is unresponsive.

VET (CONT'D)

We will keep him here for a day or
two. Give him some good fluids. You
can come back in two days to pick
him up.

James is out of it.

VET (CONT'D)

Eventually, the most humane thing
would be to help him on his way.

(beat)

He lived a long life.

(beat)

I'm sorry.

James' eyes fill with tears.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

James walks back alone.

The street is empty. Dark. A remote part of town.

A few cars wizz by every now and then.

James passes by a HOMELESS MAN sleeping in the door frame of
a closed shop. A small box for spare change in front of him.

A few paces later is an old bar. James moves towards it.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

James enters the smoke-suffocating darkness of the bar.

A few other abandoned SOULS occupy the bar. Each one lost in
their own silence. James will fit in just fine.

The only sound comes from the TV hanging above the bar.

James walks up to the bar and takes a seat on a stool. The
BARTENDER approaches him.

BARTENDER

What can I get you?

JAMES

I'll have a Scotch. No ice.

The bartender grabs a short glass, and with a few swift
movements, James' order appears before him. He lights a
cigarette.

Not far from him, a MAN is passed out at the bar. There are
empty glasses in front of him, a few beer bottles, and a full
ashtray of cigarette buds.

James stares at his drink. He sips it, slowly.

From the TV, a NEWS ANCHOR, woman, practically shouts the breaking news at the viewers.

NEWS ANCHOR

(dramatic)

According to the latest research, the economy is in a sharp decline. What does this mean for homeowners and their families?

(beat)

No arrests have yet been made in the case of the kidnapped child in Hikle Street. The police are asking the local community to share any information they may have with the local police force. The hashtag pray-for-Lilly has been trending for days.

(beat)

Our guest tonight is one of the country's best life coaches. He will be sharing his profound knowledge on how we can be better members of our own community. This and more on--

Her sentence is cut off. The bartender has switched the channel to a football game.

The silence in the bar continues.

James finishes his Scotch, then motions to the bartender for another.

INT. HOUSE/HALLWAY - NIGHT

James carefully enters his house - on tiptoes. Tipsy. He tries very hard to not make any noise. The house is quiet.

INT. DEN - NIGHT

James closes the door behind him. He leans on it for a moment to balance himself. Heavy breaths. Frail.

He takes out the cigarette pack from his pocket. Lights one.

He looks around the room. He sees Helen's present on his desk. He picks it up, then lies down on his couch.

He opens the cover. Helen wrote a note on the first page:

"Dear dad,

Happy Birthday!

Thank you for always being there for me. May there be many more birthdays to come. Hope you enjoy the book!

Love, Helen."

James gets a little emotional, but clears his throat out of it. Takes another long pull from his cigarette.

He flips through the pages. The contents of the book are already familiar to him. He is more interested in the style and print of this edition.

The fragments of Heraclitus pass before him as he flips through the book.

Then, he reaches the following fragment:

"War is the father and king of all: some he has made gods, and some men; some slaves and some free."

He focuses on the word free. He closes the book and sets it aside. He takes heavy pulls from his cigarette and watches the crack on the ceiling. It has gotten worse since the last time he saw it.

Slowly, his mind falls apart.

FLASHBACKS:

Luke appears behind him in the supermarket.

The eyes of the terrified 8-year-old in the supermarket parking lot.

The neighbor slaps his wife.

Luke strokes Spike.

Spike motionless in the backyard.

Luke at the train station.

"PHOENIX EXPRESS 1843"

"2 YEARS LATER AND STILL NO ANSWERS! What happened to the Phoenix Express no. 1843?"

Helen.

END FLASHBACKS.

His face deforms. He begins to sob loudly. One hand clutches his shirt, the other drops to the floor.

James' whole being is cracking. His face is misshapen, red, exhausted. His body malnourished and his consciousness broken.

The more he sobs, the larger the crack on the ceiling becomes. He sobs, the crack extends. James notices the pattern. He cannot hold on anymore. He screams and cries, tears burning down his face.

He smashes his hand into his own chest and then claws at his own face.

The crack expands across the entire ceiling. With one last wail from the lost soul below it, the entire ceiling collapses onto him. Behind the ceiling, darkness swallows him.

INT. DARKNESS - NIGHT

James falls through the darkness. Disoriented. He tries to grab on to the wall to stop the fall.

The wall is covered in black SLIME. The slime moves as if it were a living thing. It reacts every time James tries to grab it.

The slime hates him.

The next time James tries to grab it, it SQUIRTS towards his eyes.

JAMES

Argh!

The top half of James' face is now covered and blinded by the slime.

Finally, the bottom approaches and James crashes into it.

INT. PIT - NIGHT

Winded by the fall, James struggles to catch a breath.

Weak, he claws at the ground and tries to make sense of an environment that he cannot see. He is deathly afraid.

Shadows surround the perimeter. He lies in the center of a large pit. The ground is plain dirt. Above him, darkness rises to infinity.

James pants. He tries to calm himself so that he can at least hear better. He sits on the ground, perfectly still.

Footsteps approach. Slowly. James turns his head in their direction. His mouth agape, terrified of what might come.

IRNIA

James.

He recognizes her voice instantly. Panicking, he tries to crawl away from her. He is completely disoriented.

IRNIA (CONT'D)

Calm down, James.

He claws at the dirt to escape her. Then grabs at the air around him, desperate for a place to hide.

Then, he reaches the wall of the pit. His hand touches the black slime. He jerks his hand away from it, terrified. He can no longer move forward.

Irnia approaches from behind him and stops at some distance away.

JAMES

Stay back!

James swings one hand wildly in front of him, hoping to keep her away.

IRNIA

I am not going to hurt you, James.

JAMES

What have you done to me?

IRNIA

You've done this to yourself,
James.

JAMES

Stay away!

James turns towards the slime and tries to climb it, blind. The slime wraps around his limbs and drags him down.

Desperately, James keeps trying, but the slime tires him out.

Irnia watches him from a distance. She doesn't intervene.

James has now completely exhausted himself. He slides to the floor, panting.

JAMES (CONT'D)
What is this? Where am I?

IRNIA
This is the end, James.
(beat)
I'm out of tea.

James tries to understand.

JAMES
What are you saying?

Irnia doesn't respond.

JAMES (CONT'D)
My family. Where are they?

IRNIA
Your family is fine, James.

JAMES
I don't believe you!

IRNIA
I'm not after you family, James.

James tries to climb the wall of slime again.

JAMES
Let me out.
(beat)
Let me out!

IRNIA
Back to the funeral?

James freezes.

IRNIA (CONT'D)
I told you. You don't have to stay,
James. But that is where you will
return.

James is on the ground again. Motionless.

IRNIA (CONT'D)
You want your daughter. I want to
live.
(beat)
A life for a life.

James tries to understand.

JAMES
 What do they think? My family. What
 will they think has happened to me?

IRNIA
 You've disappeared.

JAMES
 I've abandoned them?

IRNIA
 Perhaps.

Beat.

IRNIA (CONT'D)
 I'll let you breathe a little.

She leaves. James can hear her footsteps fade away.

INT. PIT - NIGHT

It isn't clear how much time has passed. A day. Or a month.

James lies on his side. His lips are dry and cracked. The
 slime over his eyes has hardened. He can barely breathe. His
 body has given up.

He hears the footsteps again. This time, he does not react to
 them.

Irnia approaches.

IRNIA
 You look horrific.

James doesn't respond.

Irnia brings a jug of water to his lips. James senses the
 water and drinks it maniacally. Most of it spills.

Irnia turns to leave.

JAMES
 (weakly)
 Wait.

Irnia stops.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 What will happen to me?

IRNIA
You will die here. Eventually.

JAMES
And.. you?

Irnia doesn't respond.

JAMES (CONT'D)
When do you die?

IRNIA
Someday. Maybe.

JAMES
Maybe.

She looks irritated.

IRNIA
You keep ignoring the prize that
you've won.

JAMES
It's not fair trade.

IRNIA
Excuse me?

JAMES
You said it was fair trade. It's
not.
(beat)
Everything else dies, but you keep
living.

IRNIA
That is my link in the chain,
James. This is yours.

James looks pathetic.

IRNIA (CONT'D)
I'll see you again, James.

Irnia walks away.

James collapses on the ground. He breathes heavily.

He turns on his back.

The surface is nowhere to be seen above him. The slime moves
its dark body across the wall.

James tries to steady his breath. He makes strange gurgling sounds. Then coughs.

But he isn't the only one that has trouble breathing in this pit.

On the other side of the pit, someone gasps for air.

James hears it. Freezes.

Slowly, he sticks his head out and tries to figure out where the sound is coming from.

He can't see anything.

LUKE
(barely audible)
James.

His voice doesn't sound threatening. It sounds desperate.

JAMES
Luke? Where are you?

On all fours, James tries to feel his way to Luke.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Where are you?

Luke can barely form words, so James follows the noise of the heavy breathing.

As he crawls to the other side of the pit, the shadows begin to reveal Luke's body. James can't see him, but this is not the same Luke that he knows.

This Luke is weak. Abused. Exhausted. His long locks a greasy crumple of dry blood. His body emaciated. Beaten.

Like James, Luke has also been blinded by the slime. But unlike James, Luke has been choked with a wire, tightly wrapped around his neck.

Slowly, James approaches him and feels his body. His hands reach the top of Luke's head. James can feel the hardened slime around his eyes. He feels his face, and then searches for the reason behind Luke's panting.

He finds the wire.

Carefully, James tries to loosen the wire as much as possible. It isn't much, but Luke is finally able to draw a deeper breath.

JAMES (CONT'D)

What is this, Luke? What is this?

LUKE

James. End her.

JAMES

What?

LUKE

Kill her.

JAMES

Luke... I can't.

LUKE

(choking)

Kill her.

JAMES

Luke. I can't. My daughter will die.

Beat.

Luke grabs James' face with one hand.

LUKE

We all disappear in the end, James.

(beat)

Don't let that snake be the only one left.

James is taken aback.

JAMES

(weak)

I can't.

Beat.

LUKE

I understand.

Luke takes James' hand and points it in the opposite direction.

James doesn't see it, but he can now sense that something horrific lies in the direction of Luke's hand.

Behind the shadows of the other side of the pit, numerous BODIES lie. Some dead. Some panting. All blinded.

Then, Luke brings James' hand to his own torso and slides it to his abdomen.

The golden dagger is lodged in Luke's stomach. James looks shocked. Gently, he feels the dagger. Luke groans from the pain.

Luke wraps James' hand around the handle, beneath his own hand. In one swift motion, he pulls the dagger out of his own abdomen.

Blinding pain spreads across Luke's face.

James now holds the dagger.

LUKE (CONT'D)
(in pain)
We all return to the earth.
(beat)
Our peace... is in the earth.

Luke's breaths become weaker and weaker. James tries to loosen the wire even more. It's too tight.

Slowly, Luke's head tilts all the way back. He stills.

James falls back. He begins to cry. He grabs his head, as if trying to extract his own mind out of it. He cannot take this.

FLASHBACKS:

The van passes by James and Spike.

The man grabs the little girl.

"War is the father and king of all: some he has made gods, and some men; some slaves and some free."

Helen.

END FLASHBACKS.

James's body stills. He goes quiet. Then angry.

He claws at the hard slime across his eyes. He drags and pulls it down. It's excruciatingly painful. But he continues. He digs his fingers as much as he can behind it. The mask cracks. Desperate, James stands on his own two feet for the first time in forever, and pulls at the stone mask with all his might.

The left side of the mask gives way and falls. His left eye can finally see.

He stops for a moment and inspects the place that he is in. He sees everything for the first time since he has fallen. The pit, the slime, dead Luke with the wire, the bodies in the shadow.

Terrified, James continues to pull on the right side of the stone mask. It, too, cracks, and falls from his right eye.

He tries to calm down a little. He looks at the shadows that surround him. Then at Luke.

The golden dagger lies next to Luke's body.

He takes it.

INT. PIT - NIGHT

Footsteps approach.

James lies on the ground. Motionless. In the same position where she last left him.

Irnia appears with another jug of water. She walks towards James, but stops halfway in the center of the pit.

Something is off.

She turns towards the shadows where Luke's body lies.

IRNIA
Luke? Honey?

She sees Luke's feet beneath the shadows. She comes closer. Realizes that Luke is dead. She actually looks sad.

IRNIA (CONT'D)
Oh, Luke. You gave up.

She moves towards him. Then stops.

She notices that the golden dagger is missing from his abdomen. Frowns.

Behind her, James appears in the middle of the pit. He stands, with the golden dagger in his right hand.

Irnia turns.

IRNIA (CONT'D)
I'm disappointed in you, James.

Beat.

IRNIA (CONT'D)
I didn't take you for a man who
would abandon his own daughter.

James doesn't respond.

IRNIA (CONT'D)
Did you kill Luke?

She looks at the bloody dagger in his hand.

IRNIA (CONT'D)
You killed my baby.
(beat)
You took him from me.

Furious, Irnia's demeanor now changes. A darkness comes forth from within her eyes.

The black slime comes down from the walls and moves towards James. Slowly, it makes its way towards the newest prey.

Irnia raises her hands and the slime accelerates towards James.

He tries to lunge at her, but the slime has caught his legs. It drags him behind. It begins to wrap around him.

James doesn't care.

He drags his heavy feet through it and moves towards her. The slime rises to his waist. James raises his hand and stabs the slime with the dagger. The creature recoils. Then attacks him again.

James stabs the creature over and over again. Then slices through its dark body. Ruthless.

The slime is in visible pain, it almost SQUEELS. Irnia raises her hands even higher in an effort to get the slime to attack with greater force. The creature tries to lunge at James, to engulf him, but it doesn't work. James is no longer the weak, desperate man that dropped through the pit.

For the first time, Irnia looks scared.

James is now even more ruthless towards the black creature. It recoils from him in horror. Confused, the creature tries to look for a way out. James stabs it one more time. Hard.

The dark creature SCREAMS. Then, it turns towards Irnia.

IRNIA (CONT'D)
(horror)
No! Stop!

Slowly, the slime shifts towards her. James sees this and pulls the dagger out of the creature.

IRNIA (CONT'D)
Get away from me! GET AWAY!

But it doesn't listen.

She tries to run in the opposite direction, but she is too slow.

The slime grabs her legs. She desperately tries to claw at it. She digs her nails into the creature and tries to rip it to pieces. It doesn't work. The furious creature captures more and more of her body.

Slowly, it climbs across her body and swallows most of her. It wraps itself around her head and blinds her. Only her mouth is now visible.

James approaches.

Irnia pants beneath the heavy black weight on her body. She cannot move at all.

She senses James in front of her.

He looks furious. Fearless. Drunk with the possibility of ending her here and now.

He moves closer. Tightens his grip around the dagger.

Irnia knows that this is her end.

IRNIA (CONT'D)
Remember. This time, you're the one
that killed her.

James holds the dagger with both hands. He raises them high above him, then stabs Irnia through the heart.

She screams.

James doesn't let go of the dagger lodged in her chest.

The ground begins to shake beneath them. A loud RUMBLE surrounds them.

The dark walls of the pit begin to crack. Then crumble.

A bright light bursts through, and swallows everything.

INT. DEN - DAY

The room is dark, wet, choking in cigarette smoke. The dark, heavy curtains are completely closed.

In front of them, a dark figure can barely be made out.

James stands in front of the curtains. He is dressed in all black. A cigarette burns in his hand.

Emily can be heard crying from the living room. Her heavy screams echo throughout the house.

Slowly, James grabs the edge of one of the curtains. He draws it open. Daylight bursts through the room. Blinding.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

Still in all black, James removes Spike's leash from the hanger.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Spike doesn't look well, but he is happy to see James. As always.

James crouches in front of Spike. He strokes the dog's head.

JAMES
One more walk?

Spike wags his tail.

EXT. STREET - DAY

James and Spike walk down the street. Spike is barely moving forward. He tries to sniff the grass and the trees with the same excitement as before. But he can't.

James' eyes are blood red. He is completely zoned out.

Spike stops next to a tree.

JAMES
(weak)
Girlfriend?

Spike isn't sure either.

CHILD

Doggy!

James turns. The mother and her child have appeared. The same mother and child from before.

CHILD (CONT'D)

Mum, can I pet him?

The mother looks at James for approval.

James is stunned.

JAMES

(shocked)

Uh... sure. Go ahead.

(beat)

He loves kids.

MOTHER

Thank you.

The girl strokes Spike's head. Spike loves it. He licks her face.

CHILD

Tee hee hee. That tickles.

MOTHER

Come on. You'll be late for the party.

CHILD

(to Spike)

Bye.

(to James)

Bye bye.

James stares at them. The mother and child rush ahead of him.

JAMES

Excuse me!

He moves towards them. Spike hobbles along.

The mother turns.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Excuse me. Do you need help?

MOTHER

(surprised)

Uh... sure. Do you know where house twelve-oh-four is?

JAMES

Yes.

James looks at the child.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I'll walk you to it.

MOTHER

Oh, thank you.

James and Spike walk adjacent to the road. The mother and child walk next to them, holding each other's hand.

Behind them, a van appears.

As it passes them, it slows down for a moment.

Then, it drives away.

FADE OUT.

THE END