

GROWING CHILDREN

Based on the novel by
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FADE IN:

EXT. MOTEL - AFTERNOON

JIM (V.O.)

Name's Jim Simple. Some time ago, I
grew three children in my attic.
Grew them like plants, you could
say.

We move in towards a second floor window, cracked for air. Within, we see a bathroom and a man--JIM, 52--both worse for wear. Jim sits on the closed lid of the toilet as he speaks into a recorder.

JIM

I know what you're thinking. Hell,
I'm thinking what you're thinking.
But it's as true a statement as
I've ever made in my life. Your
sake much as mine.

Jim lowers the recorder from his mouth, thinking of what to say. He looks out the half-opened door to the bedroom beyond. A body beneath a blanket shifts.

Jim closes the door and raises the recorder back up.

JIM (CONT'D)

Thought I could write this thing
out. Realized I don't got the time
or skill for any that shit. Best I
speak it. Easy for me, easy for
you. This my talk therapy. All my
demons right into the mic.

Jim sits up a little. We get our best look at his face: used up, abused up, and tired. Bruises cover his face.

JIM (CONT'D)

Suppose you could say we're on the
run. So strap in, buckle up. I got
a story for you. Let's get this one
and done.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

The bride and groom kiss, then make their way towards the entryway. Jim is our groom--a vision of clean masculinity!

JIM (V.O.)

Back in 2024, I married the love of my life, Diane. Met in our mid-thirties, married in our mid-thirties. We were taken with each other. So much so we were trying long before we tied the knot. Of children, we were both on the page.

Jim and DIANE, 35, ring the church's bell. Their smiles are so big, they look connected.

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I remember once saying to her, telling her, Alright, let's say how many kids we want at the same time, see if we line up. And she said, goes, Let's do it. And on my count we blurted out, Four kids! Just like that! How we both laughed...

Jim and Diane race down the church steps into an all-white convertible. The crowd rushes out to see them off. They kiss again as the convertible races off, cans rattling off the bumper.

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But medical issues popped up like weeds in an empty lot. Started with her, then crept over to me like a winter cold. My count wasn't low, but it wasn't high, which I guess meant it wasn't normal. Doctor told us if we kept going at it natural, it may never happen for us at all. So, I began to look into it.

The convertible continues down the winding road, getting further afield.

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Adoption. Insemination. In vitro. But Diane was determined to do it no help. Told me it was her ego. Wanted to feel like a real woman. I didn't blame her, and anyways, three years of trying later, it happened.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Diane screams in delivery. Jim holds her hand as he witnesses his child being born, as he hears his child crying. Jim looks delighted.

JIM (V.O.)
 Robin Simple, pink and healthy.
 Looked so much like me, fresh out
 the oven, it was kinda spooky.

ROBIN is placed on Diane's fast moving, sweat-slicked chest.

Diane and Jim kiss each other before they stare into the life they tried so desperately to bring into the world.

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE - MORNING

A beautiful home, well-appointed. Jim opens the front door, robe wrapped tight around him, and walks slowly down his slippery driveway, looking left and right, his face an apple core in the cold. Robin is on his hip.

JIM (V.O.)
 A year later, a patch of black ice
 did the job. I remember thinking,
 Where's my wife, where is she, why
 is she taking so long?

Jim walks with increased urgency, slipping here and there. Brittle air piles out of his mouth. Snow dresses him and Robin in nature's dandruff.

Eventually, he sees something. Rushes forward. Eyes bulge as he yelps in horror--Robin starts to cry.

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 That image? In my head forever.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - AFTERNOON - TWO YEARS LATER

Jim and Robin (now a 3-year old) are in a playground. Jim stands watch as Robin is on the floor, spinning the wheels on his toy car, intensely watching their rotation. A few others, children in tow, mill about.

JIM (V.O.)
 Used to wonder, Would we ever have
 had more kids? The promised four,
 you know? But nah. Not so sure.
 (MORE)

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

By the time Diane was a year buried, Robin was turning four and something was wrong. I tried ignoring the signs--what did I know about milestones?--but as it happened, it took a random stranger for me to realize the truth.

A trio of young kids approach Robin, try to engage him in play. Robin ignores them, just looks up into the sky, smiles, and shakes his head back and forth.

Jim makes to intercept, but the kids leave and a WOMAN approaches him from the side, getting his attention.

WOMAN

Autism? Don't worry, my kids are good to those like that. I've taught them respect and love for all, the way Jesus taught it to me.

JIM

Excuse me?

WOMAN

Your son. I can tell.

JIM

Tell what?

WOMAN

Tell he's autistic.

JIM

Oh, you can tell?

WOMAN

I can tell. I should be able to. I work with children like him.

Jim shakes his head in disbelief.

JIM

This is coming off pretty fucking rude, lady. Just saying.

The Woman pats his shoulder. Motherly, lovingly.

WOMAN

Early intervention is key.

The Woman walks away, whistling for her kids, collecting them. Jim appears stunned, off-balance--afraid.

Jim then quickly picks Robin off the floor, as if the park itself has become radioactive. He rushes out.

Robin continues to spin the wheels on his car.

JIM (V.O.)

I began to see things clearly after that. Felt to me like the beginning of the end. The curtain drawing on the sweetest of dreams.

MONTAGE - JIM'S NEW REALITY

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Robin got older, but he didn't grow up. He was like a train without a rail. And what's the point of that?

- Jim struggles to potty-train Robin.
- Jim is frustrated as he tries to teach Robin how to dress himself.
- Jim shows anger as Robin displays his picky appetite.

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Yeah, I got him help how I could. But at the end of the day, an Olympic runner isn't teaching jack shit to a paraplegic.

- Jim, sunk deep in a chair in the corner of an occupational therapist's office, as Robin looks everywhere around the room except at the therapist, herself.

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Robin had an affliction of the mind, and no amount of soft talking gurus were going to pull him out from the deep.

- Jim wakes up at 3 A.M., bleary-eyed, to the sound of Robin making engine sounds as he spins the wheels of all his lined-up cars at once. Jim rages, kicks the toys out of order. Robin plugs his ears with a finger and a shoulder. Jim leaves, returns to his room, screams into his pillow.

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I didn't know what I hated more. My son, or his autism. One or the other. Maybe both. Likely both. More often than not, I was losing it on him. That was how the years went.

(MORE)

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Less highs, more lows...until a
black midnight of a Christmas week,
Robin's fifteenth, my fifty-first,
when an idea struck me...

END MONTAGE

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

We see a cheap plastic Santa by the front door, lit from within by a flickering lightbulb.

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The interior of the house is dead, empty, soulless. Joy hasn't been felt here in a long time.

Jim is slouched in a wingback in his living room, staring into his fireplace, a whiskey in hand.

JIM (V.O.)
Hadn't done a tree in a few years.
And this was the first without
gifts. I had forgotten what being
happy and fulfilled felt
like...which got me wondering...

Jim takes a drink.

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Why not remember? Why not try to?
It had been a long long time since
I had a thought like that. In other
words, what did I deserve in my
life? What did I want?

Jim takes a big-boy swig! No grimace! No chaser!

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The more I drank that night, the
more answers bubbled up in front of
me. Some popped before I got a good
look, but others floated just long
enough, suspended in time, and in
them I saw little worlds full of
possibility. Soapy orbs filled with
reflections of a happier me.
Answers. I saw answers to what my
heart--and my mind--wanted the
most.

Jim leans forward. His eyes glow with the feverish dance of the roaring flames. He appears possessed.

JIM

I want more children. Healthy children. Growing children. All to make up for that sleeping gyp upstairs.

Jim sits up, excited, lively, inspired. As if his battery-pack has been installed after years of disuse. He drains the rest of his drink down his red-raw throat.

JIM (CONT'D)

Yeah, yeah, why not? Regular kids, real typical--average, even! The chance to be a normal father for once, to experience what me or Diane never got a chance to...

Jim stands and paces.

JIM (CONT'D)

Ok. Ok. But how?

Jim goes to his kitchen, picks up his whiskey bottle. One swig, two swig, three swig, four. He returns to pacing.

JIM (CONT'D)

I'd like them to be mine, really mine, so no adoption, that wouldn't work. But what? Find a woman to screw?

Jim slows for a moment, taking in a framed photograph of Diane and himself, pre-Robin. He then continues on, walking like a roach on wet glass--purposeful, energetic.

JIM (CONT'D)

No, no, no. Won't do. Who's competing with Diane? No one I've ever come across. Don't even think I could get it up for anyone else--can barely get it saluting for me. But maybe for a one-off...

All of a sudden, Jim stops. A dark reality washes across his face.

JIM (V.O.)

I couldn't help but think, I thought, Shoot, what if those children came out same as Robin?

(MORE)

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

What if I was the cause of his retardation, rather than it being a fluke of nature? Couldn't have been Diane, no, not her. But me? Am I to blame? Am I?

Jim blinks the questions away.

JIM

No. No way. Impossible. Not her. Not me. Just Robin--only one to blame. But let's see if I can't fix it.

Jim turns off the fireplace, dresses, hops into his velvet green pickup.

EXT. STREETS - NIGHT

Jim--drunk--drives out of suburbia in a hot squeal of tires, in search of a Christmas present to himself.

At the first red light before the highway, Jim looks toward his passenger seat and sees an old, familiar friend: COWBOY, his alcoholic inner-demon.

COWBOY

Shit, lookatchu. Man on mission.

The Cowboy yee-haws and slaps his knee in giddy delight. Jim gives a hint of a smile.

COWBOY (CONT'D)

What adventure we on tonight, my man? Looking for some smooth box to ride? Looking for a new Momma? Hey, I support I support. Do your thang just make sure you grease your throat some more. I know a good spot for it.

Jim sees the light turn green and goes towards downtown. We see swoopy highways and a lit-city beyond, like a glowing meteorite.

EXT. BAR - NIGHT

Jim arrives fast, surrounded by glass skyscrapers and muddy neon lights. He feels a little pinched in. A little parched. A little pale. He pulls into a spot, opens his truck door, blows his yams onto the street. He wipes his mouth, throws up again.

Jim gets out and enters the bar across the street.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

A bar: overcrowded, filled with beer-sweating bodies.

JIM (V.O.)

I was looking for nothing short of a woman willing to provide me her eggs, no strings attached. Figured in a transactional place like this, that wouldn't be too hard to find. Hey, if this all sounds crazy to you, fuck it, it was. But I wasn't just drunk, I was hurting. Bust my balls if you want. I ain't giving excuses, just explanations. I own my shame.

A bartender materializes and asks his question.

JIM

Coors.

The bartender brings it. Cowboy appears behind Jim, rubs his shoulders, leans in close for a whisper.

COWBOY

More, more, more...

Jim orders a shot to befriend his beer. Two little tagalongs. But his hands shake. Cowboy notices this, sniffs in embarrassment, and disappears into the crowd.

Jim looks around.

JIM (V.O.)

I was thinking, how much do eggs cost, anyways? How about just one? Could you get a single, or needed a whole dozen? And how many kids can grow in each? See, money was never an issue for me, but I was realizing the weight of my request just might be. I was starting to feel like I shot a load and missed the mark--go-figure.

Jim leaves his drinks behind and goes to the bathroom. Takes a big time, stinky leak. Splashes cold water on his face. Stares at the old man staring back.

JIM
Go time, sucker. Go go go go go.

Jim leaves the bathroom and goes for broke. Approaches a woman in a small group of friends.

JIM (CONT'D)
How're y'doing, pretty lady?

The pretty lady looks at Jim up and down. Then turns around and laughs into her daiquiri.

Jim moves on to another WOMAN.

JIM (CONT'D)
Excuse me? Hi. You look amazing.
Mind if I buy you a drink or something?

WOMAN
A gentleman exists! I'll take a margarita. My friend will take...what'll you take? Look, him. Okay. Alright. She'll take a Cosmo.

JIM
Your friend?

JIM looks and sees a hippo of a woman.

JIM (CONT'D)
You got it.

But Jim decides to get fresh air. Cowboy tries to block the door but he's a soft touch and bows out of Jim's way easily enough.

EXT. BAR - NIGHT

Jim approaches a SMOKING WOMAN.

JIM
Can I have a smoke?

SMOKING WOMAN
Can you?

JIM
May I--

SMOKING WOMAN
Stop, fucking with you. Here.

The Smoking Woman gives Jim a stick.

SMOKING WOMAN (CONT'D)
Got a light?

JIM
No. I'm actually not a smoker. But tonight I am.

SMOKING WOMAN
Oh? Bit old to be starting new habits, yeah?

JIM
Actually, no. Never too late for stuff like that.

Jim allows himself a small, weak chuckle.

JIM (CONT'D)
I'm trying to get a few in, tonight. Life's too short not to try out everything at least once.

SMOKING WOMAN
Clever. Bit sad, though.

JIM
Don't get old, then. You'll be clever and sad. Shit combo.

SMOKING WOMAN
Name's Vero.

VERO holds out a hand and the pair shake. She hands him a smoke, lights him up.

JIM (V.O.)
Now at this point, I'm thinking to myself, Okay, got one on some type of hook, here. But how to keep her from breaking loose?

VERO
You here with anyone?

JIM
Alone, party of one.

Glacial walls rise up before Vero. Jim senses it.

VERO
Ah.

JIM
I'm actually here for a reason.

VERO
Most of us here, are. Mine's to
drink and smoke. Yours different?

JIM
Well--

VERO
Spare me if it has to do with
pussy.

Jim sqiurms. Shakes his head sadly. Then heels out his
cigarette and walks away. He returns to his truck.

JIM (V.O.)
I considered going home, get back
before Robin woke up. Had this new
habit of playing with the burners.
Hearing them click. His therapist
said it was his way of making
music. I said, Well you don't have
to worry about your house burning
down, do you?

The dashboard's green numbers read 12:57. He puts the gear
shift into drive and cruises.

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But then at the moment I thought,
fuck it, I still got time. And if
my place flamed up, then it flamed
up. Is what it is, folks.

EXT. STREETS - NIGHT

As Jim drives, downtown bristles with fuzzy neon lights and
yells and gunshots. A cyberpunk dream city in its starting
stage.

The sights and sounds drizzle across Jim's windshield.

Eventually, he finds himself on the other side of town,
across the tracks, where the glittering lights don't reach,
and the shadows stretch and quiver.

Bums wobble and jiggle. Addicts crouch in mid-injection.
Thugs pass joints. At a stoplight, Jim sees a whole school of
prostitutes selling their hot property.

JIM (V.O.)
 Occurred to me, Huh, ain't nothing
 easier to buy than a woman who's on
 the sell, right...

The light turns green, but there is no one behind Jim, so he holds the line. The light turns red, again. Jim is in deep thought.

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 I was thinking, How desperate was I
 to--?

A hard knock arrives on his window. Jim jumps. A PIMP is looking in at him.

PIMP
 Mas bájo. Lower the window.

Jim lowers it. He doesn't know why.

PIMP (CONT'D)
 You here for shop? If not, move.

Jim nods his head, slowly. The Pimp waves him over toward the side of the street. Jim rolls across. The Pimp approaches again.

PIMP (CONT'D)
 Habla español, gringo?

Jim shakes his head. Seesaws his hand back and forth.

PIMP (CONT'D)
 Alright. You fed?

JIM
 Do I look like a fed?

PIMP
 I'm asking you.

JIM
 No.

PIMP
 How I know this?

JIM
 Smell my breath. Been drinking
 whiskey all day. Feds do a lot--but
 they don't drink and drive.

PIMP
Not the good ones.

JIM
Not the bad ones, either.

The Pimp laughs.

PIMP
How you like woman? Real or not?

Jim looks around, trying to make out the humans from the androids, but they all look the same to him.

JIM
Real.

PIMP
Brown, black, white? I got one china but you gotta wait a lil while.

JIM
White.

PIMP
Cash first, then fuck. And don't drive away with them, or we chase and give you long bad night.

Jim nods. The Pimp departs and a second later Jim's passenger side door opens and a PROSTITUE slips in.

INT. JIM'S TRUCK - NIGHT

JIM
Hey. Name's Jim.

PROSTITUE
You must be new to this giving your name out like that.

JIM
Maybe Jim isn't my real name.

PROSTITUE
Nah you look like a Jim, Jim.

JIM
What's yours?

The Prostitute gives an asthmatic laugh.

PROSTITUE

You're really new to this. My name is "Fifty for a blow, hundred for a fuck."

Jim opens his wallet and pulls out two-hundred. Hands it over.

JIM

I'm more interested in your time if you can give that to me.

The money disappears into the Prostitute's pink bra.

PROSTITUE

Talk about what? I'm all ears. Unless this is about you giving me verses. I get that enough, already...

JIM

Naw, fuck the Bible. Actually, listen. This is going to sound crazy--

PROSTITUE

I'm used to crazy--

JIM

I want someone to have kids with, someone I can pay for it. No other conditions.

PROSTITUE

Fuck for?

JIM

My perogative.

PROSTITUE

Your business?

JIM

What I said.

PROSTITUE

I ain't doing that for you. For no one, that matter.

JIM

Well I'm not asking for you, specifically. Just wondering if you know someone that's open to it.

The Prostitute muses.

PROSTITUE
I do, but it'll cost you.

JIM
Cost me what? How much?

PROSTITUE
Whatever else green you got in your
wallet.

Jim doesn't make a show of disappointment. Just hands over
the leftover cash.

PROSTITUE (CONT'D)
Now give me your number. I'll hand
it to my connect. And my connect
will reach out to you. Maybe.

JIM
I just paid for a maybe?

PROSTITUE
Better than paying for a no.

JIM
Okay. This was a waste of time,
wasn't it?

The Prostitute gets out of Jim's car, but looks back in
briefly.

PROSTITUE
Maybe. But I don't think so.

Jim drives off, returns home.

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jim checks on Robin. His blanket of vrooming cars has fallen
onto the floor. Jim picks it up, lays it back on his son.
Tucks him in.

Jim leaves, undresses, lays in bed, but it looks like sleep
is a long distance away from him. Cowboy lays next to him,
10-gallon hat on his chest.

COWBOY
I can help you get to sleep.

JIM
Alright.

Jim reaches beneath his bed and pulls out a small bottle of whiskey. He takes two pulls and is about to fall into a fitful sleep when his phone rings--the number is private.

JIM (CONT'D)

Hello? Who's this?

PASSENGER

I've received your request. I want to make it. Come true.

JIM

Yeah? Who the fuck is this though?

PASSENGER

My name is. Passenger. Meet me this afternoon at Lone Hope cemetery. Aisle G. You know it well.

Passenger kills the line.

Jim takes a few more pulls from his whiskey bottle. Attempts to get rest.

JIM (V.O.)

Something shifted inside me. Didn't know what, but it felt like some big change was coming my way. I was scared, confused, but I'd be a fucking liar if I didn't say a larger part of me than I wanted to give account to wasn't excited. I didn't know how this Passenger fella could help me, but I knew he could. I felt it in the air, like a wind of change, a sweet-smelling breeze. Opportunity and possibility. A second chance...at least an illusion of one. I was willing to bite, see where it led.

EXT. LONE HOPE CEMETERY - AFTERNOON

Jim pulls into the cemetery, aisle G. Robin is in the backseat. No one is there, save for them. He throws the car into park.

JIM

Don't move, alright? Play with my phone.

Jim hands Robin his phone, then kills the engine and steps out. He walks to Diane's gravestone.

JIM (V.O.)
 Knowing about Diane didn't bother
 me, it was in the news. What
 bothered me was why this guy wanted
 to meet here at all.

Jim arrives at Diane's gravestone.

Seconds later, an all-black Lincoln pulls up in front of
 Jim's truck.

The backseat door opens, and out comes a large man, black and
 bald, dressed in an overgrown striped suit with a standard
 blue tie flopping down well past his belt line. His
 parachute-sized pants covered most of the dress shoes on his
 feet.

He approaches Jim.

PASSENGER
 My name is Passenger. Your name is
 Jim Simple.

Jim nods his head apprehensively and shakes the man's hand.

JIM
 Why are we here?

PASSENGER
 Why not? Other than to pay our
 respects to the dearly departed?

Passenger walks to the gravestone and places a hand atop it.

JIM
 Cut it out. What's the point?

Passenger gives a sad smile.

PASSENGER
 Why does a man who is a single
 parent. To an autistic child. Want
 more children?

JIM
 How do you know that about my son?

PASSENGER
 Research. So why more children?

JIM
 Personal.

PASSENGER

Can't be. If you want my help.

Jim appears frustrated for a moment. Then almost relieved to tell someone else--a stranger--his truth.

JIM

Look. My wife and I wanted four kids. Four. It was kinda our thing. Our shared dream. We got one but then she died. And anyways, the one we got is broken. Okay? Broken. She may no longer be here, but I am, and I'd like to make that wish of ours come true. I want the real experience of fatherhood, the one I never got.

PASSENGER

There's more to it, isn't there?

JIM

It's as much as you're going to get.

PASSENGER

Does your one child. Disappoint you so?

JIM

More than not. Yeah.

PASSENGER

Hm.

JIM

You judging me?

PASSENGER

Just making an. Observation.

JIM

Uh-huh...

PASSENGER

So. You just want. Another chance?

JIM

Yeah.

PASSENGER

You have exhausted. All your options?

JIM

Yeah.

PASSENGER

Surrogacy.

JIM

Yeah, that was one idea. But a touch too sweet for me.

PASSENGER

Adoption.

JIM

Red tape up the ass. Even if there wasn't, that whole thing prevents me from being genetically related to the child. Cuts no ice.

Passenger looks thoughtful.

PASSENGER

So. Genetics. Very important. To you?

JIM

Very.

PASSENGER

And her?

JIM

I'm sorry?

PASSENGER

How important is it? That child is related. To her?

Passenger points to Diane's gravestone.

JIM

What the fuck are you talking about?

PASSENGER

What is your desire to continue the family. That you started with Diane?

JIM

What?

PASSENGER

Simple question. Jim Simple.

JIM

Okay. If my wife was still alive, yeah, I'd desire it. But she's dead, and know what, so is this conversation. Thanks and all, but I'm thinking this was a mistake.

Jim turns and begins to walk away. But then Passenger says something that stops him in his tracks.

PASSENGER

What would Diane have wanted?

A glimmer appears in Passenger's eyes, and a smile deepens across his expansive face. A gust ripples his suit and tie.

PASSENGER (CONT'D)

For a reasonable fee. I'll have Diane dug free of her earthly prison. Wire her to my machinery. And with your seed, you and her can continue having children. Growing. Children.

Jim cocks his head, his mouth dropping open a little.

JIM

What?

PASSENGER

We are at a crossroads of interest. Your desire. My curiosity.

JIM

What are you saying? Bring my wife back from the dead?

PASSENGER

In a way, yes. But through science. The very limits of which I operate in. Can. At times. Mimic enchantment.

Jim, uncertain and uncomfortable, starts to back up.

PASSENGER (CONT'D)

Your wife will remain bones. But her life-force can be tapped into. She can live. Again. Through the progeny you and her produce. Think on it. We will reach out.

Jim turns and jogs away. He gets a look at the driver of the Lincoln. A small, wiry black man wearing sunglasses and a suit of his own. He smiles and waves at Jim.

Jim hops into his truck and dips out, Robin none the wiser to anything that has happened.

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Jim makes himself a strong fucking drink, then feeds Robin, changes his diaper, washes him in the shower, and puts him to his room.

His body is here but his mind is elsewhere...his mind is on Passenger.

Eventually, Jim falls asleep in front of his fireplace.

EXT. ROBIN'S SCHOOL - MORNING

Jim, shaved and dressed in business casual, drops Robin off at school. Robin's TEACHER opens up the backseat door for Robin.

TEACHER

Hi buddy, hiii, ready for school?
Hi, Mr. Simple, how're you?

JIM

Been better. Thanks for asking.

TEACHER

Gearing up for Christmas break?

JIM

That and other things. Take care.

TEACHER

You too!

Jim drives off to work.

EXT. JIM'S OFFICE BUILDING - MORNING

A wide shot of an office building. On the roof is a large, plastic cooler, and sure enough, the sign beneath it reads BITTER'S COOLERS. You can smell the office politics from a distance.

INT. JIM'S OFFICE BUILDING - MORNING

Phones ringing, printing machines going, office workers pattering back and forth. This isn't exactly Wall Street. The workers here are skating by.

Across the way, we see Jim walk into an office. It's not a corner lot, but it's his alone, and we follow him inside as he sits at his desk and goes through some papers.

Bored with what he's looking at, we see him lean back, then open the bottom drawer of his desk. A small cooler (a BITTER'S, of course) reveals itself. He opens it up and grabs himself a cold beer.

JIM (V.O.)

Through the years I figured out how to drink on the job without getting caught. A few sips every hour does the trick. But that day I wanted to forget, so I crushed two back to back, just to start.

Jim rips one can, then another. The beer spatters down his lips, his chin. He looks like a put-together mess.

MONTAGE - JIM'S DAILY GRIND OF FRUSTRATION

- Jim sits in a braindead meeting, looking drained and wasted.
- Jim stumbles into Robin's room, curses at him for stinking up the house. Calls him names, such as: a dope, a smooth-brained idiot, an asshole.
- Jim takes a bite of a nasty-looking sandwich, before vomiting into his garbage pail beside his desk--a garbage pail filled with crushed beer cans.
- Jim walks past Robin near the top of their staircase, miming a punch into the back of his head, a hit that would clearly send his boy tumbling down the long flight of steps.

MONTAGE ENDS

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It's how my days went. Weeks of it. A big fat sauced blur of work/life bullshit. You forget and forget and forget. But sometimes you remember, and it's the remembering that often stings the most.

(MORE)

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I realized: it is possible to love someone and hate them at the time. It is what it is. Thing is, that mounting frustration of mine began to leak out in unexpected ways.

EXT. JIM'S SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - AFTERNOON

Jim returns to suburbia from work, windows down, watching all the kids and their parents he passed, happy families, all.

JIM (V.O.)

Those perfect families and their perfect kids...I began to hate every single one of them.

Jim drives past his house and into the parking lot of a nearby park. He takes a pull from an opened can of beer sitting in his cupholder. He then leans out his window.

JIM

Hey. Hey kids! Fuck you all, you little fucking faggots! Hope you and your families all suck cocks and fucking die!

Jim squeals out of the park, pulls into a gas station and cries his eyes out. He then makes as if he wants to throw his beer away, but realizes there's more still inside. He finishes it, then throws it out.

He drives home miserable.

JIM (V.O.)

I was beginning to wonder what the pistol in my glove department would taste like. And if I had it in me to pull.

INT. JIM'S OFFICE BUILDING - AFTERNOON

An exhausted Jim at his desk, hands in face, trying to stay awake. An opened beer can is next to him. His work phone rings.

JIM

Simple.

SECRETARY

There's someone here to visit you. Driver, I believe.

JIM

What? Who?

SECRETARY

His name is Driver. He said you were expecting him?

JIM

Oh. Alright. Yes, yeah. Let him in.

Jim puts his can of beer beneath him. Moments later, his door opens. No knock. In walks DRIVER, who as it happens, is the driver of the Lincoln that Passenger was in. He's in a suit, sunglasses on. He sits opposite Jim.

JIM (CONT'D)

You're his driver.

DRIVER

Yes, it's one of my occupations. It's also my name.

JIM

Alright.

Driver leans forward, stretches out a wrinkled hand. Jim takes it--and regrets it. The grip is Biblical! Jim almost yells out.

JIM (CONT'D)

What do you want?

DRIVER

Passenger has stated that you have had enough time to mull over things? Undecided or not, he is requesting you to see his Palace. What he calls his laboratory. Perhaps it'll move the needle of your trust towards the positive.

JIM

No.

DRIVER

Why?

JIM

What he's offering...If it ain't a con, it terrifies me.

DRIVER

What's so scary about having your desire fulfilled?

Driver removes his sunglasses. He winces slightly. Marble white eyes look out at Jim. So big and white, it looks as if you could pluck them out and play 8-ball with them.

JIM

You're blind?

DRIVER

No. I can manually operate a vehicle, after all, can't I? No, my eyes see better than yours. Better than most, now. In fact, I can see that unfinished beer you have between your feet. About a quarter of it left. Brand: Starlight Booze.

Jim looks paralyzed.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

I can see more. I can see deep into the heart of Man. I know you are suspicious of us. But I also know you are hurting. You don't see this through, it will haunt you for the rest of your life. Truth be told, your curiosity is a thing, Mr. Simple: a yellow cat. It's perched atop your head, scratching at you as if you were a post--

Driver's smile falters a little as he points to the corner of the room. We see Cowboy, but he is facing the wall.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

--and I see a cattleman, too, standing right there in the corner. I don't think he wants to be seen.

Driver returns his moonlit gaze to a bewildered Jim.

JIM

Sounds like you and Passenger are more than eager to get me to agree to whatever it is you got planned.

DRIVER

You know what we have planned.

JIM

I've an idea.

DRIVER

Come to the Palace.

JIM

No. Why? I've already walked. Be honest, you being here feels a little desperate.

DRIVER

Perhaps. But it takes one to know one, doesn't it? Just don't confuse desperation with generosity. I didn't have to be sent here. Passenger is a thoughtful soul: a purple beaver hangs down from his neck.

JIM

Cool. What's greed, then?

DRIVER

A green pigeon--

JIM

Because maybe that's what you two are all about. You find someone with deep pockets, someone in a personal bind, and you exploit them.

DRIVER

You consider yourself vulnerable?

JIM

What I consider myself and what I actually am are two different things.

DRIVER

Being?

JIM

I don't fucking know. But I'm not one to get my leg pulled.

DRIVER

Remember, you sought us out. Wasn't the other way around.

JIM

Yeah. Well. Casinos don't go to gamblers.

DRIVER

There's no place for luck in the Palace. Come. We can address your concerns.

JIM

Fuck your Palace. How about that?

DRIVER

You hide your interest poorly.
You're intrigued, aren't you?

Jim takes a deep breath, leans back, appraises Driver.

JIM

Yeah. Yeah. I am.

Driver stands. He removes from his pocket a piece of paper. He hands it to Jim, puts on his sunglasses, and walks away.

Jim watches him leave, then opens up the paper: an address, a date, a time: **PALACE / 5700 UWE ST. / TONIGHT AT 9 P.M.**

JIM (V.O.)

He was right about one thing. I had to see this thing through. I had to step through the portal. I always knew I would. And I guess they did, too. I had nothing left to live for. The leap was there for the taking. And I decided right there and then, I was taking. No going back. Either the parachute opened or it didn't.

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jim and Robin at home. Robin drools in front of the television. Jim is in the kitchen, cooking up yellow rice and chicken.

As the food cooks, Jim opens a drawer and retrieves a paper and pen. On it he writes: **HELLO MAILMAN, DISABLED SON @ HOME, CALL POLICE.**

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

He then goes outside, tapes the message inside his mailbox, and raises the red flag for good measure.

JIM (V.O.)

In case I didn't return from the Palace...

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jim returns inside and finishes cooking. He plates Robin big mountains of rice, and plates himself a little less, with some chicken on the side.

He then serves his son and sits next to him in front of the television. Cartoons, loud and zany.

JIM
Robin. Love you.

Robin doesn't respond.

JIM (CONT'D)
Robin, you hear daddy? I said I
love you.

Robin inserts a mound of rice into his mouth with his hand and giggles.

JIM (CONT'D)
Robin, when someone says they love
you, you should say it back. I love
you. I. Love. You.

Robin's giggle turns into a silent laugh as he points toward his food and shakes his shoulders. He then continues to feed himself, rice sticking to his cheeks, falling onto the floor.

JIM (V.O.)
I thought about taking the plate
and throwing it against the wall--
or him.

JIM
Robin, you in there?

ROBIN
In there?

JIM
There you go! Love you.

ROBIN
There you go.

JIM
Can I have a bite?

Jim leans in, mouth open. Theatrical. Robin ignores.

JIM (CONT'D)
Is that a no?

ROBIN

No.

JIM

Alright. Almost time for bed, okay?
Early night tonight. For you, at
least.

Robin turns his head toward Jim for the first time that day. Looks deep into his eyes. And then returns his gaze back towards his food, laughing silently again.

Jim feels a fiery rage leap up in his chest.

JIM (CONT'D)

Know what's really funny, Robin?
You're such a stupid dumbass, you
don't even know how dumb you are.
The real joke is that you are one.

Jim gets up.

JIM (CONT'D)

Enjoy your food.

But as Jim is about to walk away, Robin makes an unusual sound, cooing, almost. Jim turns.

Robin is looking at him, and in an outstretched hand, is a small pile of rice. An offering. And in Robin's eyes is a knowing look. A sad look.

Jim, shaken, stumbles away into the kitchen. Forces the rest of his food down his mouth in big shovels, as if trying to bury whatever strong emotions are now clawing up his throat. Afterwards, he douses it with a stiff drink.

JIM (V.O.)

Hey, I know. I know. How did I really think I could handle more kids, when I couldn't handle the one I already got? But way I saw it, I was a hot kettle over a going stovetop, whistling loud. Reasoned that if I got me some normal kids, got a chance to be a normal father, it'll get me feeling like I'm off the fire. Get the pressure relieved. Thought by extension that would make me a better father to Robin...I don't know. Take from that what you will. Even I still don't understand it.

Jim gets Robin showered, changed, and in his room without a fight. Gives him a kiss on the head, which feels to Jim like a kiss goodbye.

Jim then gets dressed and hops into his truck. He pulls his pistol from the lockbox in his glove compartment. Puts it into his jean's waistband.

EXT. PALACE - NIGHT

Jim drives to the address in question, which turns out to be in a shithole neighborhood.

Jim parks and walks over to the house. The presence of his pistol gives him strength.

Jim reaches out to knock on the front door, when it opens right up. Driver is in the doorway.

DRIVER

Mr. Simple

JIM

Driver.

Driver puts out his hand for a shake.

JIM (CONT'D)

Go easy on the grip.

Driver smiles but doesn't go easy.

DRIVER

Come on in.

INT. PALACE ABOVEGROUND - NIGHT

Jim walks in. It's a dump. Women in states of undress lay around. Young women driven old by a hard life. Lines of coke on the coffee table. Liquor. Marijuana. Cigarettes.

JIM

Hell of a place you got.

DRIVER

Please. Follow me. We are going to the basement. I won't persuade you to give up your pistol, but do keep it out of sight. It may not look it to you, but this is a professional establishment. Upstairs, and down.

Jim nods his head. He's tense, coiled, ready for anything.

Driver walks forward and Jim follows, looking in the rooms they passed: clothes in heaps, window shades in tatters, mold dancing out of the corners.

In the back of the house, a door with a keypad lay. The basement door. Driver covers it and punches in the numbers. It hisses open. They start down the stairs, the door closing behind them.

JIM

Okay...

INT. PALACE BELOWGROUND - NIGHT

At the bottom of the stairs, an unimaginably long hallway, half a mile long. Christmas lighting covers the walls and ceiling, and every few feet are Christmas trees of all kinds.

In and out, crisscrossing room-to-room, men. Some in lab coats, others in polos and khakis. They gesture, talk, and laugh as they go--a lively group. All the while, sounds of buzzing, sawing, screwing, pounding, clanging. Work was being done down here.

DRIVER

Welcome.

JIM

Interesting. Taxpayer funded? Or the ladies upstairs help with that?

DRIVER

Perceptive, Mr. Simple. The ladies help--in their own, unique way. Come, now.

Driver and Jim walk down the hall.

In one room, Jim sees a man getting his finger cut off, only to see it grow back instantly--purple, long, and thin, kind of like a squirming worm.

In another, Jim witnesses a man covered in flowers and grass. He's watering himself.

Most of the rooms are mundane: men playing cards, holding conferences, tapping away at their keyboards, sleeping on cots.

Eventually, Driver stops. Opens a half-closed door. Within, Passenger looks up from a desk.

JIM
Hello again.

PASSENGER
Hello, hello. Come in. Take a look-
see.

INT. PALACE BELOWGROUND (TRIAGE) - NIGHT

Jim walks in first, sees a few beds covered by privacy curtains. He hears medical equipment bleeping and blooping.

JIM
I'm looking and I'm seeing, but
still wondering what you want to
show me.

Passenger stands. So tall, the top of his black, shiny egghead nearly brushes the ceiling. He looks even taller than when we last saw him.

Passenger walks over towards one of the privacy curtains and draws it back. Jim comes over to get a closer look. Driver remains in the doorframe, leaning on it casually.

A WOMAN ON THE BED is behind the curtain. She has a bulbous apparatus strapped over her belly. A pale-yellow fluid pulses within.

JIM (CONT'D)
What am I looking at?

PASSENGER
I call it. The vessel. It is a
womb. Inside of which. A child
grows.

The Woman On The Bed smiles and flutters her fingers at me. Jim notices she has almost no teeth.

JIM
I don't understand...

PASSENGER
She wanted a child. With boyfriend.
Didn't want to disfigure her form.
The vessel helps with that.

Jim nods his head slowly.

JIM

Sure. I can get that. Fine. But won't laying down like that for nine months mess her body up, anyways? Or can she walk with that thing? How does it even work?

PASSENGER

Relax. Understand. Through this process. No nine-month wait. She began process. Three weeks ago. One more remains. Until baby emerges.

JIM

That fast? How is that possible?

PASSENGER

Science. Jim Simple. Science. I have a finger in all the pies you saw out there. Each one. But this pie? My special recipe.

JIM

Okay.

PASSENGER

Of it all. I believe this one. To be my most profitable. Fast pregnancy. No lifetime scars. Little to no trauma.

But Jim notices all the wires and tubes going from the vessel into the Woman On The Bed.

JIM

Those things don't leave any marks?

PASSENGER

Teeny-tiny. They heal.

JIM

All that lying down can't be good for the blood flow.

PASSENGER

Massages help with pooling.

Jim points to the vessel.

JIM

So there's a baby in there?

DRIVER (O.S.)

Oh yes. She's sucking on her thumb at the moment. Dreaming about a past life she lived, as a cancan dancer in France.

WOMAN ON THE BED

What's a cancan?

Jim turns to look at a smiling Driver. The Christmas lights reflect off his sunglasses in a warm glow. Jim then looks at Passenger.

JIM

So...this baby belongs fully to her and her boyfriend?

PASSENGER

Who else?

Passenger points to a tube sticking out the side of the vessel.

PASSENGER (CONT'D)

The seed is placed here. Then this dial--

Passenger points to a numbered dial on the side of the vessel, near the tube.

PASSENGER (CONT'D)

--is turned, activating the number of embryos you want. Guaranteed stick.

Jim's eyes widen. The dial is numbered 1-5.

JIM

Up to five children can grow inside this thing at once?

PASSENGER

Correct.

JIM

How many times have you done this before? How many successful births?

PASSENGER

Many times. Many successes.

Jim looks at the Woman On The Bed.

JIM
You trust all this?

WOMAN ON THE BED
I'm high, man.

Passenger waves her comment off. Then settles his gaze expectantly upon Jim, as if waiting for Jim to say something.

JIM
Listen, here's my thing. What's this got to do with my specific situation? My whole thing is less straightforward, get what I'm saying?

Passenger walks past Jim and opens the curtain of the bed next to the Woman On The Bed, revealing a pillsbury-sized man (with a receding hairline and five-o'clock shadow), connected to another vessel.

JIM (CONT'D)
What the fuck is this?

DRIVER (O.S.)
Don't be rude. It's an orange otter crawling up your back.

PASSENGER
I understand the alarm. But no need. He is like you. Desiring of children. But not a partner. A baby grows within.

Passenger leans in over the Man On The Bed. Checks his vitals.

PASSENGER (CONT'D)
How are you feeling?

MAN ON THE BED
Excited!

JIM
Hold on. The person attached to the vessel doesn't need to be a woman?

MAN ON THE BED
Excuse you. I am a woman.

PASSENGER
She is full woman. I assure you. But no, all the vessel needs is. A body and sperm.

JIM

How?

PASSENGER

Science.

JIM

Not good enough.

Passenger laughed: staccato, awkward. For a moment, his head freezes in the up position, mouth wide open. Driver gets off the doorway. But Passenger collects himself as if nothing happened.

PASSENGER

It must be, Jim Simple. To explain it to you fully. Would only confuse you more.

JIM

Explain it to me normal, then. Give me the layman's terms.

PASSENGER

To oversimplify such a complex achievement. Is no small effort. But. In the interest of the challenge, itself, allow me to put it to you this way. All those tubes. And wires. Connect to the person's D. N. A. This code is funneled back into the vessel, which creates an artificial egg. Next, add sperm. Eventually, birth.

JIM

Wasn't so hard, was it?

PASSENGER

I suppose not!

Driver chuckles in the background.

JIM

So what I'm hearing is that he--
she--is having a child with
herself?

PASSENGER

Correct.

JIM

But if she transitioned, how did you get access to her sperm?

PASSENGER

We banked it. Some time ago.

JIM

Okay. What about the sexes of the children? Can you choose?

PASSENGER

Random.

JIM

Okay.

PASSENGER

Precise questions. Now, follow me.
Let's talk in private.

Passenger leaves and Jim follows. Driver stays behind.

INT. PALACE BELOWGROUND (PASSENGER'S APT.) - NIGHT

A few doors down is Passenger's room. Inside is an apartment.
Candles light it sparingly.

JIM

Moody.

PASSENGER

Driver's benefit. So he can rest
his eyes.

JIM

Got it. Hey, let me ask you this,
you're so good at what you do, why
are you not working for the
government? Why here, the bottom of
a whore house?

Passenger directs Jim to the main couch. Passenger sits near
him on a recliner.

PASSENGER

Maybe it is a government site.
Perhaps you stumbled. Into one. As
to your whore house comment. What
they allow us to do. Is quite nice.
And I don't mean sex. Though that
is part of it. For the men, though.
Not for me. I'm a youth in that
regard. Innocent ole me.

JIM

K. Can we talk business?

PASSENGER

Of course. The vessel I have created. Will in fact. Work with a deceased individual.

JIM

Have you done that before?

PASSENGER

No. But it will work. Bones are DNA rich. The marrow? More so.

JIM

You have no issues desecrating the dead?

PASSENGER

Do you?

JIM

I asked first.

PASSENGER

I have no qualms. The dead can serve a purpose again, beyond feeding worms. It's a beautiful notion. Wouldn't you agree?

JIM

Sure. Can't believe I'm saying that, though.

PASSENGER

Believe it.

JIM

So say I agree. What's the plan?

PASSENGER

Simple, Jim Simple. Pay half upfront. Shows your commitment. We retrieve your wife. Take her to your home. Connect a vessel. In a month's time, I'll return. To deliver the children. And you deliver the second half of your payment. Your wife is then returned. To her place of rest. The end.

JIM

Sounds more complicated than you're making it come out as. And why my house? Why not here?

PASSENGER
Would you prefer it here?

JIM
No.

PASSENGER
There you go. But it is an option.

JIM
Yeah. No.

PASSENGER
You pay. We handle everything.
Smooooooooothly.

JIM
And this'll work out? No issues? No
blowback?

PASSENGER
No issues. No blowback.

JIM
And what would be the earliest this
happens?

PASSENGER
Soon as your first payment.

JIM
And how much would that be?

Jim braces for the shoe to drop.

PASSENGER
\$20,000, first payment. \$20,000,
second payment. Pennies.
Considering the price of
alternative options. You know.

JIM
Shit. You charge those two in
triage over there that much?

PASSENGER
We charged. But nothing financial.

JIM
I can't get that deal?

PASSENGER
No. You can't.

JIM

Why?

Passenger is quiet.

JIM (CONT'D)

Okay, fine. Well I wouldn't call it pennies, that's for goddamn sure. But okay...\$40,000 total? We talking cash, here?

PASSENGER

Cold and hard.

JIM

Let's move ahead on this, then. But I do have one request. Actually, two.

PASSENGER

Go on.

JIM

I want to be there when my wife is taken out. I want to make sure she's handled right. If you can't allow for that, then...

PASSENGER

An easy concession. As you wish. So shall it be. What else?

JIM

And I'm thinking, much as I hate to admit it, I'ma need some kinda help. Someone in the know, but surface level. Get me?

PASSENGER

Live-in?

JIM

Shoot, maybe. Yeah. Just keep the aspect of my wife's involvement...

PASSENGER

We run a tight ship. Mr. Simple. These are simple arrangements. Anything else?

JIM

No.

Passenger holds his hand out and Jim shakes it. They get up, and Jim takes the lead towards the apartment's front door.

When Jim opens the door, Driver is on the other side.

PASSENGER (O.S.)
He's agreed. Do what needs doing,
Driver.

Driver nods his head and beckons Jim to follow him. They leave the palace.

EXT. PALACE - NIGHT

JIM
Come by my job tomorrow. I'll have
the 20k.

DRIVER
Very well.

EXT. STREETS - NIGHT

Jim drives back home.

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jim pulls in front of his mailbox and removes the note. He then goes inside his garage.

Jim checks on Robin, then goes to his room and falls asleep.

EXT. BANK - MORNING

Jim goes inside a bank and gets two separate manilla envelopes, \$20,000 in each.

INT. JIM'S OFFICE BUILDING - AFTERNOON

Jim is in his office, fanning through some sales reports, when his secretary calls him.

SECRETARY
Sir. Driver is here to see you.

JIM
Send him in.

As before, Driver opens Jim's door, no knock. He nears the desk but doesn't sit.

DRIVER
Do you have it?

JIM
Here you go.

Jim hands him one of the manilla envelopes. Driver looks at it briefly, then stows it away into his suit pocket.

JIM (CONT'D)
You ain't gonna take it and run,
are you?

DRIVER
And leave the second payout on the
table?

Driver shakes his head.

DRIVER (CONT'D)
We move tonight. I'll pick you up
at midnight.

JIM
Know where I live, I suppose?

DRIVER
Of course.

JIM
Anything you can't see?

Driver considers. He looks momentarily haunted.

DRIVER
God.

Driver turns on the spot and leaves.

Jim, disturbed, tries to get back to work but can't concentrate. Moments later, a knock comes at his door.

JIM
Come in!

His SECRETARY enters, timid as usual.

JIM (CONT'D)
Hey. Everything alright?

SECRETARY

Sorry to bother you. But that man who was just in here? Driver?

JIM

Yeah?

SECRETARY

I didn't mention this last time, because I didn't think nothing of it, but when he left, he said something to me along the lines of, You are depressed, it's like an off-white polar on your chest. Something like that.

JIM

Oh? Okay.

SECRETARY

Yeah, it was weird, but whatever. Thing is, today, he looked at me, pointed at me, and said, Time to change your pad. Told me how I bled through. I didn't even know what to say to that. Still don't.

Jim looks down for a moment, imagining all the new paperwork headed his way. He returns his gaze to his Secretary, appearing apologetic.

JIM

I do apologize for that. I will open an investigation into it right away. And I assure you, this individual will not be returning here again.

SECRETARY

Thank you, sir. Again, I'm sorry.

JIM

Nothing to be sorry about.

The Secretary leaves. Jim buries his face into his hands. But when he brings his head back up, his face isn't one of frustration, but...realization.

JIM (V.O.)

Maybe it was her mentioning tampons, but it made me realize how fucking unprepared I was for my incoming children, in terms of the basics: diapers, clothes, cribs, formula. And time off.

Jim gets on the horn and dials up his boss, MR. RAY.

JIM

Mr. Ray? Yeah. Hi. Listen, there's been a bit of an incident with my secretary. On top of that, something else I'd like to discuss with you. Yeah? Alright, be right there.

Jim hangs up and walks over to the corner of the floor, where Mr. Ray's office is. Jim knocks and only comes in when Mr. Ray beckons him in a second later.

INT. JIM'S OFFICE BUILDING (MR. RAY'S OFFICE) - AFTERNOON

Jim wastes no time explaining what the secretary told him, while he quickly fills out an incident report.

MR. RAY

Who the fuck is Driver, anyways?

JIM

You know...he's...he's some fan of the company. Wanted to talk shop about improving the design of our coolers--

MR. RAY

And you let a nut like that in? Who the fuck does he think he is? And what kinda freaky name is Driver, anyhow?

JIM

I took him with honest interest the first go-round, then just humored him on the second. It's my bad.

MR. RAY

Sounds like it is your bad, alright. Jesus. Don't let him back in here, you hear me?

JIM
Loud and clear.

MR. RAY
Christ almighty.

JIM
There's one other thing.

MR. RAY
Oh Lord.

JIM
I was hoping for some time off.
Some extended time. Been thinking
about it for a while, but maybe
there's no better time than now.
All things considered.

MR. RAY
Shoot. Might be a good play. How
long you thinking.

JIM
Few weeks. All things considered...

MR. RAY
Yeah, keep saying that. Shit. Fuck.
It's this climate, you know? Can't
even share pens without fear of
grazing a woman's fingers.

JIM
It's that kind of world.

MR. RAY
But he did overstep. Pads?
Christttt.

JIM
Couldn't agree more.

MR. RAY
Alright, Jim. Take your few weeks.
We'll phase you in, afterwards. A
work from home stint. Then get you
back at your desk in no time.

JIM
Okay.

MR. RAY
Lay low, you know?

JIM
Yea.

MR. RAY
Be easy.

JIM
I will.

They shake hands and Jim leaves. For the day. For the next few weeks. Forever.

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jim on hands and knees in Robin's room, cleaning his Legos and cars. Robin watches silently from beneath his blanket.

Still on knees, Jim makes his way over towards his son, makes sure he's tucked in, and kisses his cheek.

JIM
I love you.

ROBIN
Yes.

Jim kisses his cheek again, then stands up and leaves the room. He turns the light off, closes the door.

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

As before, Jim takes his handwritten note and puts it in his mailbox, red flag up.

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jim returns home, dresses in all black, and stuffs his pistol into the waistband of his pants.

Jim goes to the bottom of his stairs near the front door, sits, waits.

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Driver's Lincoln pulls up. Jim leaves his house to meet them.

Jim approaches Driver's window as it slides down--he doesn't have his sunglasses on. Inside the vehicle are some TOUGH GUYS.

DRIVER

No time like the present. Get in.

Jim gets in. Driver backs up and cruises away.

EXT. STREETS - NIGHT

JIM

I appreciate your comment to my secretary.

DRIVER

Couldn't help myself.

Jim shakes his head. The Lincoln drives through a quiet, deserted night, heavy with tension.

EXT. LONE HOPE CEMETERY - NIGHT

The cemetery's gates are wide open. Two Tough-Guys are standing either side of the old cemetery guard who looks terrified. A running car is just inside.

As the Lincoln drives through, Jim turns in his seat and watches as one of the Tough-Guys closes the fence. The other seems to be holding something close to the old guard's back.

JIM

What's going on with that?

DRIVER

You know, violence is a red crocodile. Lives on our hands, right across our knuckles.

JIM

Great to know. But I'm not happy seeing this.

DRIVER

You'd be less pleased if that man took our money and still ratted us out, which he was planning to. I saw it. So I told him about the stents I saw in his chest. And the things I know he has saved on his laptop back home.

JIM

Bullshit...

DRIVER
You know it's not.

Jim falls silent. Seconds later, Driver parks in front of Aisle G. The Tough-Guys get shovels from the trunk, everyone receiving one but Jim.

Jim leads the way and points out Diane's gravestone. Everyone but Jim begins to dig.

DRIVER (CONT'D)
Mind giving us a hand?

JIM
No extra shovel.

DRIVER
But you do have an extra hand or two, don't you?

JIM
Yeah, sure. Hey, backhoe out of the budget?

Driver gives him a moonlit stare.

Jim just gets down to business, using his hands to tear out the sod.

JIM (CONT'D)
How long you think this'll take?

DRIVER
Long as it takes to get to the center of the Tootsie Pop.

Eventually, the other car that was just inside the cemetery pulls up, and one of the other two Tough-Guys comes out. He brings with him two shovels. One for Jim, one for himself.

The work goes faster. And soon, it is finished.

The top of Diane's hardwood coffin appears. All of the men are standing around it, breathing hard, eyes and mouths wide open in tired astonishment.

JIM (V.O.)
It was like unearthing a treasure chest. And in a way, isn't that what a coffin is? A box of memories, secrets, dreams undreamed?

DRIVER

It'd be wise if you now wait in the car. We won't be much longer.

JIM

Not happening.

Driver looked at one of the Tough-Guys.

DRIVER

Abra la caja.

One of the Tough-Guys takes out a crowbar, lodges it into the coffin. After some exertion, it swings up.

Diane's skeleton reveals itself. The emerald dress she's wearing still looks new: like a batch of seaweed that glistens beneath clear waters.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Now for this part, I really do suggest you go wait in the car.

JIM

Cut the shit and let's get on with it.

Driver nods to another Tough-Guy, who unfolds a bag. Driver then looks at Jim.

DRIVER

She'll go in there for the time being. Fine?

JIM

Every part but her skull...and her pelvis, too. I'm holding those.

Driver nods and looks down at Diane's skeleton. A soft smile appears at the corners of his mouth.

DRIVER

My vision is clearer than I thought. I can see death, Jim. Wouldn't you know it?

Jim waits.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

It's a crow. Blacker than black. It's caged within her ribs.

JIM

Let's just get on with this.
Please.

Driver looks to the Tough-Guys.

DRIVER

Pon los huesos adentro. Ten
cuidado. Solo dale al hombre el
cráneo...y el hueso de la pelvis.

The Tough-Guys get to it. The head and pelvis are given over to Jim, who sits and marvels at these macabre artifacts.

The Tough-Guys begin to put the dirt back in.

JIM (V.O.)

It was like I was holding onto talismans: the casings of her mind, her sex. What made her, her. It was like I called her back from the underworld to perform some final rite. To be or not to be. Life, death, life again. Diane's second coming was here, and beneath the shock of it all, I felt a deep gratitude and love for her. But more, I felt justification: I was ready to be a father again--I wanted it, needed it, and come what may, I was going to get it.

The Tough-Guys lay the pieces of sod back on the grave, and everything looks as it once was.

Everyone makes their way back to the cars. Diane's bagged bones are placed into the trunk of the Lincoln.

DRIVER

The hard part is over.
Congratulations.

Jim is too mesmerized by the bones in his hands to respond to Driver.

The cars drive off. The lone Tough-Guy at the front of the cemetery, who is still holding the guard hostage, lets him go and hops into one of the cars.

They drive off into the night.

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The cars pull into Jim's driveway. Another vehicle is parked there. Jim and Driver step out.

Jim rushes to his house as Driver grabs the bag from the trunk of his car. Jim puts a hand on his door...it opens.

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Passenger is within, sitting in Jim's wingback.

Jim walks forward. Passenger looks over.

PASSENGER
Greetings. Salutations.

JIM
Made yourself at home.

PASSENGER
I'm sure you don't mind.

JIM
How did you get in?

PASSENGER
What's a lock to me? Needed to set up. Now all that remains--

Passenger registers Diane's bones in Jim's hands.

PASSENGER (CONT'D)
--are the remains.

Driver enters the house. He closes the door quietly behind himself.

JIM
Have you seen my son?

PASSENGER
Asleep.

Jim looks around.

JIM
So where is it?

PASSENGER
Your attic.

Jim looks up, as if he can see through the walls.

PASSENGER (CONT'D)
Far from prying eyes.

JIM
No kidding. Show me.

The threesome go upstairs. Passenger opens the attic door. Driver goes up, first. Jim, second. Passenger last.

INT. JIM'S ATTIC - NIGHT

A large, unfinished attic: wooden beams and insulation, water heaters and cooling ducts.

Centered on the plywood floor, is a long table. On top of it is an empty, sagging, colorless version of the vessel. Wires and tubes and electrical nodes stick out from it. It looks like a beached jellyfish.

JIM
What now?

Passenger gestures for the skull and pelvis. Jim gives it over, apprehensively. Passenger lays both out on the table, then gestures to Driver, who gives him the bag of bones.

PASSENGER
Now I assemble.

JIM
What else do you need from me?

PASSENGER
Your patience. An hour of it. And--

Passenger produces a small vial from his pants pocket. Hands it to Jim.

PASSENGER (CONT'D)
--your seed.

JIM
Okay.

PASSENGER
I do suggest. Filling it. Only when the hour has passed. The fresher. The better.

JIM
Okay...

Passenger looks to Driver.

PASSENGER

I can do this. On my own.

Driver nods.

Being dismissed, Driver and Jim leave Passenger to it. Jim walks Driver out of the house, but not before checking in on Robin--who is sound asleep--from the doorway.

JIM

(whispering)

Big brother, soon. And they're gonna be perfect...unlike you.

Jim leaves the doorway.

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The Tough-Guys lounge outside the cars as they smoke and laugh.

Jim catches up to Driver, outside.

JIM

Hey. Just wanna say thanks. Appreciate all this.

DRIVER

Don't thank me yet. Still have a ways to go.

JIM

Yeah.

DRIVER

You feel ready for them?

JIM

I'd say so.

DRIVER

They'll be a handful.

JIM

Makes you say that?

Driver laughs.

DRIVER

What kids aren't?

Driver gets into his car. The Tough-Guys follow suit. They leave.

Jim retrieves his note from the mailbox once again, and then returns home.

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jim looks up at the attic door, hears Passenger's footsteps walking around--and power tools going off. Jim goes to sit near the attic door...and falls asleep.

But some time later, he's awakened by a unique sound: the filling of a balloon, then the flush of liquid. Jim looks up, and all of a sudden, a bright green light shines out from around the edges of the attic door in a wavering dance.

JIM
Almost time...

Jim gets up, pulls the vial out of his pocket, goes to the bathroom.

Minutes later, he exits. The vial is a quarter filled: tapioca. He walks to the attic door and opens it. An avocado glow lights the second floor, haunting and magnificent.

PASSENGER (O.S.)
Come up, Jim Simple.

INT. JIM'S ATTIC - NIGHT

Jim goes up.

Passenger is in front of the vessel, blocking the view.

PASSENGER
She is ready.

Passenger steps aside.

The vessel is tucked within Diane's ribcage. The green light which comes from the vessel is overwhelming--alien. Water surges within. All the wires and cables are connected to her skeletal frame.

JIM
What's next?

PASSENGER
Your seed.

Passenger points to where the tube must go. Jim twists it in. He's lightheaded with longing.

Passenger now points to the dial.

PASSENGER (CONT'D)
Go ahead.

Jim turns it to 3.

PASSENGER (CONT'D)
Final answer?

Jim nods his head. Licks his lips.

Passenger reaches out and presses a button on the side. Bubbles erupt within the vessel, a volcanic surge. Jim steps back as Passenger grins widely.

PASSENGER (CONT'D)
I will return. In a month. To deliver.

JIM
Okay.

PASSENGER
Any questions?

JIM
No way to dim the light, here?

PASSENGER
All will settle.

JIM
And if things don't?

PASSENGER
Everything will be fine.

JIM
You said that before.

PASSENGER
And I meant it. Before.

Passenger walks forward, puts a hand on Jim's shoulder.

PASSENGER (CONT'D)
I'll show myself out.

Passenger starts down the attic steps, but just as his head is about to disappear, he turns toward Jim.

PASSENGER (CONT'D)

I do hope you find something to love in these children. No one is perfect. Least of all ourselves.

Passenger slips from view.

Jim turns to face Diane and puts a hand on the vessel. Warm! Jim then draws a finger along her skeleton.

A hand goes to his mouth and his face contorts. Now he cries: happiness, sadness, fear, all in one. He gathers himself and leans in, kisses his wife's skull: her forehead, her cheek, her teeth. He lays down and hugs her as the camera recedes, allowing them this private moment.

CUT TO BLACK:

A beat. Silence.

FADE IN:

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

SUPER: "ONE MONTH LATER"

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - MORNING

We weave through Jim's house. Eventually we look up and see the attic door open. We slowly move up towards it, enter it.

INT. JIM'S ATTIC - MORNING

Passenger, Driver, and Jim surround Diane and the vessel, which is now a pale, sickly yellow. Passenger presses a button and the liquid inside funnels out. The vessel's skin forms a shroud upon three shifting figures.

Passenger produces a blade. Jim starts. Passenger slices the vessel open. No sound emerges, no crying, nothing. But the children's movements are erratic, lively.

PASSENGER

Do not fear. Nothing to fear.
Everything normal.

JIM

Are they alright?

Passenger gathers three umbilical cords together and cuts through them.

DRIVER

Let him work.

Jim stands down. Watches.

Passenger removes all three children from the vessel and places them on a soft blanket between Diane's bony legs. The writhing children are larger than typical newborns--quite larger.

PASSENGER

Healthy.

Jim moves in for a closer look. We get one from above: two boys and a girl.

JIM

Yeah but why aren't they crying? Is that normal?

PASSENGER

What's normal. About anything. That has happened. This last month?

JIM

Right...

PASSENGER

Have you thought of names?

JIM

I picked out a few since I didn't know the sexes.

Jim relaxes, takes in his children with an appraising, awe-struck gaze. Drinks them in with his eyes--and they, him.

PASSENGER

And?

JIM

Daniel, Philip, Teresa.

PASSENGER

Good names

DRIVER

Beautiful names. They do look like you. A touch of the nose on each.

Jim leans in so their reaching hands graze and poke and smack his face.

JIM

My God...

PASSENGER

I assume you have. A room. For them?

JIM

Of course.

PASSENGER

Bring them there, now. Skin-to-skin. And food, of course. I must remove. The vessel. Should take. But a moment.

Jim picks up two, Driver one.

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - MORNING

They go downstairs, pass Robin's room (he's on his knees, watching TV), and go into the next. It's a splendid nursery: three cribs, a changing table, a large armchair.

From a distance, we watch as Jim puts Daniel down, takes off his shirt, and then sits in the armchair and puts Daniel on his chest, first. Driver then places Philip and Teresa on Jim.

JIM

Mind helping with the formula?

DRIVER

Sure.

JIM

You have kids of your own?

DRIVER

In a way.

Driver helps make the bottles. To Jim's surprise, the three children are able to grab them and put the nipples to their mouths.

JIM

Woah. Wow.

DRIVER

See it this way, Jim. They're making your job easier. Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.

JIM
Yeah, no, I hear you. I'm just
saying.

Jim looks at each of them in turn, amazement on his face.

DRIVER
Now, about that second payment.

JIM
Downstairs, cabinet beneath the
microwave.

DRIVER
Very well.

JIM
I suppose I can thank you, now.

DRIVER
I suppose you can.

JIM
Thank you.

DRIVER
You are welcome...

The babies continue to chug at their bottles. Jim notices how Teresa is nearly done with hers.

Driver is about to step away, but he turns back towards Jim.

DRIVER (CONT'D)
Know what I see when I look at your
three new children?

JIM
Do I want to know?

DRIVER
I see a chance to better yourself.

Right then, Passenger finishes and Driver meets him in the hall. Robin comes out of his room and Driver pats him on the head on the way out.

Jim hears the drawer downstairs open and close. Then the front door opening and closing.

Outside, Driver's Lincoln starts and both he and Passenger are out of Jim's life. For now.

JIM

Robin, come see your siblings.

But Robin just goes back into his room, shaking his head and fluttering his fingers in front of his eyes.

Jim looks at each of his children. They look back at him. Quietly. Intensely. Knowingly. He moves his head around and marvels at how they track him. He makes a game of it. He laughs in delight. Daniel laughs back.

JIM (V.O.)

That was one of the weirdest,
happiest moments of my life. Now I
can't even think back on it without
feeling sick.

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

A new car pulls up, never before seen. Music blasting. Car shuts off, a woman comes out. MOZA, 27, the help mentioned to Jim weeks ago.

Moza walks up to Jim's house and rings the bell.

Jim answers.

MOZA

Hi. Jim Simple?

JIM

That's right.

MOZA

Moza Duran. Here for the kids.

Jim and Moza shake hands.

JIM

Glad you're here. Come in.

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Moza comes in, kicks her shoes off, whistles at the interior of the house.

MOZA

This is quite the place. Goodness
gracious.

JIM

Thank you. Drink coffee?

MOZA
Live for it.

JIM
Follow me.

They walk through the house and enter the kitchen. Robin is there, sitting at the island, looking through a magazine of hot rods.

MOZA
Who's this guy?

JIM
My son. Robin.

MOZA
One of the...?

JIM
No.

MOZA
Oh, okay.

JIM
Why would you say that? He's fifteen. They were born today.

MOZA
Yeah, right, yeah. No, I know. Just...yeah, I don't know.

Jim prepares the coffee machine.

JIM
How you like it?

MOZA
Black from the pump.

JIM
Really.

MOZA
Oh yeah.

JIM
Alright.

Moza turns to Robin.

MOZA

Hey, Robin. Hi! My name's Moza.
What you looking for, bud?

JIM

He's autistic. He's not one to
start, participate, or finish a
back-and-forth.

MOZA

That's alright. Hey buddy. What
kinda cool car is--

JIM

You didn't hear what I said?

MOZA

Doesn't mean you shouldn't try.

JIM

Doesn't mean you shouldn't listen.
I'm the father. You're the help.
Keep opinions like that between
your ears.

Moza laughs good-naturedly.

MOZA

Cranky.

JIM

Who, me?

MOZA

Mm-hm.

JIM

I'm coming off that way?

MOZA

Oh yeh.

JIM

Got a lot on my plate.

MOZA

Three new babies on your plate.

JIM

Exactly. And they listen better to
me than you and Robin do.

Robin departs with his magazine, stimming the entire way. Jim presses the button on the coffee machine so it starts brewing.

MOZA
Can I see them?

JIM
Sleeping right now. Soon.

MOZA
Oh-kay, no problemo.

Jim paces back and forth, looking down.

MOZA (CONT'D)
Feels like...we're not really getting off to a good start, here.

JIM
This is awkward for me.

MOZA
Why?

JIM
Haven't had a woman in my house-- let alone live with me--since my wife passed away. I guess I'm just trying to put some boundaries up.

MOZA
Put 'em up!

JIM
I just need a worker.

MOZA
A worker!

JIM
Not a spouse. Not a mother. Not a girlfriend.

MOZA
No spouse, mother, or girlfriend!

Moza salutes.

JIM
Okay?

MOZA

Wouldn't want it even if you paid me for it. And what you're paying me now is pretty darn nice.

This catches Jim off guard.

MOZA (CONT'D)

I know why I'm here...and I'm thankful you know, too.

JIM

Boundary established?

MOZA

Line's in the sand.

Jim appears to lighten up. He grabs two cups and places them near the coffee machine.

JIM

No sugar?

MOZA

Nah.

JIM

I may have to fire you on the basis of that alone.

MOZA

I'll haunt your dreams.

Jim chuckles, Moza smiles. Jim pours the coffee, fixes them up, serves them.

MOZA (CONT'D)

Thank you.

JIM

Yep.

MOZA

So what do they look like? You?

JIM

Nature's paternity test got me. Hey, how much was told to you?

MOZA

From?

JIM

Driver. Passenger.

MOZA

Just that you got three kids. From the vessel.

JIM

They mention anything about who it was attached to?

MOZA

No. Wanna say?

JIM

No.

MOZA

Okay.

JIM

Yeah.

MOZA

That's fine.

JIM

I know.

MOZA

Doesn't sound suspicious at all.

JIM

Hey, whatever the case, they're here, and your job is to help me care for them, not ask questions.

MOZA

You asked the question first.

JIM

Because I can.

Moza salutes again.

MOZA

And I can't? What's the deal, here? You've always been this controlling?

JIM

No. But what, you're not used to that?

MOZA

What's that supposed to mean?

Jim takes a drink of his coffee. Puts the mug down. Looks at her with a frank demeanor.

JIM

What's your day job, typically? By that, I mean night job.

MOZA

You say it like you know it. So say what you mean to say. With your chest.

JIM

You're a prostitute, aren't you?

MOZA

Yeah. How you know? I got the look of one?

JIM

I recognize you. From the Palace. Gotta be real, I'm not too thrilled about this. Having someone like you in my house.

MOZA

You wanted someone with an idea of what's going on here. I'm someone with an idea of what's going on, here.

JIM

Yeah. I guess I just expected someone else.

MOZA

What you afraid of? I'ma want to suck your cock? Or I bring someone else here, to suck their cock?

JIM

No--

MOZA

We just agreed on borders and limitations, man.

JIM

Yeah--

MOZA

So if this is how you're...hey, you're acting like you weren't window shopping awhile back. I know you had Honeypot in your car.

JIM

What the fuck is honeypot?

MOZA

Who the fuck is Honeypot, is what you should be asking.

JIM

Considered it asked!

MOZA

She's the one that tipped you off when you were riding around for open snatch.

JIM

I wasn't riding around--I wasn't--

MOZA

But you know who I'm talking about.

JIM

Yeah. I do. And we talked. Just talked.

MOZA

She said you did a little more than that, Jimbo...

JIM

She's a fucking liar, then.

MOZA

And so are you. And so am I. And so is the rest of the world. Big. Fucking. Deal. Don't project on me to make yourself feel better about what you had to do to get those kids.

Jim stumbles for an answer.

MOZA (CONT'D)

My line of work, STD'S ain't the only thing that spreads. Word does, too.

JIM
What you saying?

MOZA
I'm saying stop walking on ice. I know who you got in your attic. It's fine. You love your wife, I respect that. I respect you, too. I can understand why you did what you did. So let's keep the truth front and center and focus on business. I'm here to work, and the only hip swinging I'm going to do is when I'm tryna put a child to rest. Capiche?

Jim takes a deep breath.

JIM
Understood.

MOZA
So can we start over, here?

JIM
Yeah. We can.

Moza lifts her cup up. Jim takes his and they clink them together. She takes a luxurious sip.

MOZA
Good coffee.

JIM
Cafe Bustelo.

MOZA
My guy!

JIM
Hungry?

MOZA
My guy! Hell yeah I'm hungry.

JIM
Eggs / bacon alright for you?

MOZA
More than. Thanks.

Jim sets up to cook. Does it quickly and with ease. Moments later, bacon and eggs are sizzling on the oven.

JIM
They're quiet.

MOZA
Come again?

JIM
The babies. They are really quiet.
Born that way. No screaming, no
crying.

MOZA
Sounds like a good thing.

JIM
Yeah, I get what you mean. It's
just--

The monitor Jim purchased makes noise. He pulls it from his robes pocket, looks at the screen, then turns off the burner.

JIM (CONT'D)
Speak of. They're up. Come on.

Jim and Moza go upstairs and enter the babies room. All three of them look their way.

Moza goes to each, checking them out.

MOZA
They're so...big.

JIM
Yeah. Let's change and feed them.

The changing goes smooth except that Teresa sees the can of formula and stretches wildly for it. Moza wrangles her whipping body away from it.

Meanwhile, Jim changes Daniel and Philip, but puts DANIEL back inside of his crib for a moment so he can inspect Philip closer.

JIM (CONT'D)
Moza, c'mere. Look at this.

Moza, feeding a fast-gulping Teresa looks over.

JIM (CONT'D)
What's this?

Jim shows her Philip's hands and feet. They look a little red.

MOZA

Weird. I don't know. Let's keep an eye on it.

JIM

Yeah...

Jim takes one of the bottles and starts to feed Philip.

He then stands over Daniel and looks at him. There's an intense intelligence that brews in his eyes. Jim smiles with pride.

JIM (CONT'D)

I'ma feed you in a second, little man.

Daniel looks as if he understands.

MOZA

I can do it, Teresa just finished hers--so fast!

Jim shakes his head.

JIM

She wants another.

MOZA

Another?

JIM

Yup. She's an eater, that one. Born only a few hours ago and has already downed more bottles than her brothers combined.

MOZA

Her belly looks filled up. Kind of swollen, actually.

JIM

I think that's...look...look at her, can you just give her another? She wants it, look at her.

Teresa's hands are clawing and gesturing more. Moza does as she is told, and her eyes bulge a little as Teresa forces the nipple into her mouth and starts chugging away.

MOZA

That's alright?

JIM
It has to be. If she's hungry,
she's hungry.

Jim finishes feeding Philip, puts him down, then feeds Daniel.

After the children are fed and put back into their cribs, Moza and Jim leave the room.

JIM (CONT'D)
Good teamwork.

MOZA
Yeah.

As they head downstairs, Jim hears the clicking of the burners. He flies downstairs.

JIM
Hey, stop touching that!

Jim swings into the kitchen and Robin immediately stops, plugging his ears, one side with a finger, the other with his shoulder.

JIM (CONT'D)
Get out, go, go!

Robin flees.

JIM (CONT'D)
Jesus fucking Christ, just what I
need.

Moza enters the kitchen.

MOZA
He was trying to finish what you
were making?

JIM
No. It's not that. It's a whole
other thing.

Moza sits down at the island, takes a sip of her coffee. Jim turns the burner back on so he can finish cooking.

MOZA
How concerned should we be about
Teresa and Philip?

Jim runs his hands through his hair.

JIM
Fucking hell...you think it's an issue?

MOZA
You're their father. What do you think.

JIM
I think it's an issue. Fuck.

MOZA
Maybe it's nothing to freak about.

JIM
You don't think?

MOZA
I don't know.

JIM
Maybe it's not. Maybe it's not.

Moza looks sympathetic.

JIM (CONT'D)
Hey. You know about the vessel, right?

MOZA
I got an idea or two.

JIM
What else do you know? In other words, what do you know about the children born from these things?

MOZA
Honestly? I've never seen them.

JIM
What?

MOZA
Yeah. Never seen them.

JIM
How is that possible?

MOZA
Jim, listen. You think us girls sign a W9? You think we onboard? Think we're working towards some pension? We do our job, come home.
(MORE)

MOZA (CONT'D)

Sometimes we do our job at home.
Guy comes upstairs, takes off his
little white coat, we fuck 'em and
send 'em back on their way
downstairs. Efficient for them.
Efficient for us. All I know is
what falls off the grapevine.

Jim blows out hot air. He turns off the burner. Slides the
bacon and eggs onto a plate. Serves it to Moza.

JIM

What about Passenger? Driver? How
much you know about them?

MOZA

Next to nada.

JIM

Golly, you're a fount of knowledge.

Moza spears a bacon and takes a bite.

MOZA

You don't want none of this?

JIM

Not hungry. But enjoy.

MOZA

If you got questions, Jim, why not
just get it from the source?

JIM

Maybe I'm afraid of the answers.

MOZA

Avoiding the doctor doesn't avoid
the disease.

JIM

Yeah. Right. Okay. Well, let's not
get too dramatic, here. I'm sure
everything's A-OK. Nothing really
to worry about but worry, itself.

MOZA

Hm.

JIM

Everything'll iron out on its own.

MOZA

Mm.

JIM
All you got to say?

MOZA
I'm trying to eat. And maybe you should, too. Thoughts like that feast on an empty stomach. Fry an egg or two, it'll clear your mind.

Jim decides she is right. He turns towards the skillet and cracks three eggs into it. The camera zooms into them as they bubble, sizzle, pop.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE

JIM (V.O.)
Ignore and enjoy now. Confront and cry later. It wasn't one or the other. It was the only path there was. All that was now required of me was to walk it blind. Where and when would the drop-off come? All that was clear was that it would, and I wouldn't be ready for how fast the undertow would drown me.

MONTAGE - HAPPY WEEKS

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Those first few weeks were as close to heaven as I had ever felt. Blinders up, smile wide, mind clear of worries...willful ignorance was my sword and shield.

- Jim takes his babies for long suburbia walks in their carriage.
- Jim bathes them and laughs as he blows bubbles and makes silly faces.
- Jim feeds and changes them as he sings and dances.
- Jim enjoys a picnic with them, marveling at each of them in turn.
- Jim runs errands with them, playing roller-coaster in the cart down aisles.
- Jim on the couch, watching a cartoon movie with the babies on his lap.

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 ...Everything normal. As things
 should've went. As I wished they
 could've been. As I now know it was
 never meant to be.

MONTAGE ENDS

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE, SUMMER - NIGHT

INT. JIM'S HOUSE, SUMMER - NIGHT

A baby cries. But it sounds like a mature cry, not one from
 an infant.

Jim and Moza launch out of their beds and make it to the
 babies room at the same time. Both are exhausted.

JIM
 First time crying.

MOZA
 Yeah...

They open the door. Daniel is the one crying--further, he's
standing, all on his own. The other babies begin to stir.

Jim rushes forward and picks Daniel up.

JIM
 And now standing? What?

MOZA
 I saw. Yeah. Two for two.

JIM
 Make a bottle for him before the
 others wake up.

Moza starts on a bottle but she's tired and makes mistakes.
 Daniel is getting more agitated.

JIM (CONT'D)
 Faster, Moza. C'mon.

MOZA
 I'm trying--

DANIEL
 Faster. Faster.

Moza whips her head around towards Jim and Daniel. Jim looks at Daniel.

JIM
What did you say?

DANIEL
Say.

Jim looks over at Moza.

MOZA
Three for three...

Daniel's face wrinkles up and he returns to crying, which wakes up the other two in full, who too scream and cry for the first time ever.

Moza rush-orders the bottle for Daniel and then makes three more. Two for Teresa, one for Philip.

The children are fed and then placed back into their cribs for sleep.

MOZA (CONT'D)
So...

JIM
I don't know. Go get rest, we'll talk about it later. Not a bad thing!

MOZA
No?

JIM
No. Of course not.

But Jim looks unconvinced.

MOZA
You're staying?

JIM
For a moment. Go. Go.

Moza leaves.

Jim turns on a soft nightlight and inspects the children as they settle in for sleep.

Teresa looks more swollen than usual, and her chest? It looks like small mounds of breasts are developing.

Philip's hands and feet look larger than before. Even his crotch area--his penis--has an outline that shouldn't be there.

David appears the most normal, despite the size of his head and his ability to stand...and talk.

Jim falls back on weak legs, collapsing in front of the cribs.

JIM (CONT'D)

No cause for concern. Hey, this is good, this is alright, it's everything you ever wanted. They're growing, just growing--

Cowboy appears beneath Daniel's crib, eyes aglow, mouth wet with drool.

COWBOY

Into monsters...

Jim scrambles out of the room in fear, shaking his head and plugging his ears (similar to how Robin does it).

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE, FALL - AFTERNOON

MONTAGE STARTS - SAD DAYS

INT. JIM'S HOUSE, FALL - AFTERNOON

JIM (V.O.)

Things developed faster, now. The conveyor belt was picking up speed.

- Daniel--only a year old but now as big as a three-year-old--learns Chess with Jim, the two in a lively conversation, Daniel's communication and size moving at rapid pace.

- Teresa in the kitchen with Jim, baking, eating everything before it's even ready. Jim isn't happy about it. Like Daniel, she is taller than her age, but her breasts and her stomach have the appearance of someone who is pregnant. The baggy clothes Jim dresses her in don't work well enough to hide it. The only words she knows is that of food-related items.

- Philip still has the size of an infant, but his feet and hands--and penis--is the size and shape of a man's. This bothers Jim, and he finds it difficult to look at him--or listen to his painful grunting sounds.

- Robin skirts around his new siblings and his father, clearly afraid and confused, but finds solace in Moza, who is doing her best to care for the children Jim is now finding...unsuitable.

JIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Before I knew it, I was a year in.
The circle was about to close, and
I was trapped inside it. Tell you
this: strange beginnings have
strange endings. Sad endings, too.

MONTAGE ENDS

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE, WINTER - EVENING

Santa is back on the front porch, lit from within. A few more Christmas-related decorations are laid out. Festive!

INT. JIM'S HOUSE, WINTER - EVENING

As we get closer to the house, there's a tense feeling in the air. Through the keyhole, through the hallway, and into the dining room, we see Jim and everyone else at the table, dinner plated in front of everyone. Jim doesn't look happy.

Teresa stuffs food down her mouth like a wild coyote. She chews viciously.

JIM

Teresa...

TERESA

Chicken, potatoes, soda, pasta--

JIM

Teresa, dammit--!

TERESA

Candy, hot dogs, pizza, burgers--

JIM

TERESA, GODDAMIT!

Jim slams a hand on the table. Everyone freezes, except for Teresa, who now licks a plate clean, her entire face up against it.

JIM (CONT'D)

EVERY FUCKING DAY THIS SHIT!

Philip, who was being fed by MOZA, grunt-cries, his man hands covering his face.

Jim leans across the table to Philip, eyes bulging.

JIM (CONT'D)
SHUT THE FUCK UP!

Moza pulls Philip away from Jim's enraged face, and tries to console him as he cries even harder.

MOZA
How dare you. How dare you.

JIM
Get off your white horse, bitch.
Always looking at me like I'm in
the wrong.

Moza stands with Philip.

TERESA
Pancakes, steak, juice--

JIM
FUCK UP!

Jim lifts the table and upends it. Teresa, undeterred, eats off the floor. Jim screams and launches a fist into the wall, breaking through plaster.

Jim goes to sit on the front steps of his house.

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE, WINTER - EVENING

Jim looks as he is about to cry, but just then, Daniel walks out.

DANIEL
Dad? Are you. Okay?

JIM
Hey. Yeah, bud. I'm fine.

DANIEL
You. Mad.

JIM
Yeah. Yeah.

DANIEL
They make you. Upset.

JIM
Who?

DANIEL
Everyone.

Jim takes a deep, quivering breath.

JIM
Yeah.

DANIEL
You hate them.

JIM
No.

DANIEL
Lie.

JIM
No. I don't hate them.

DANIEL
You. Lie. Tell truth.

Jim blinks uncomfortably.

JIM
Okay...yeah...

DANIEL
Why?

JIM
They're just not like you.

DANIEL
And Moza?

JIM
Oh. She has a way of making me feel
less a good father. Which I suppose
I am.

DANIEL
No. You're not.

JIM
Thanks, son. You know, you're my
favorite.

DANIEL
Am I?

JIM

100%.

Daniel smiles softly, distantly.

DANIEL

Nothing's ever. 100%. But soon.
Soon.

Daniel goes back inside the house. Jim decides to return as well.

INT. JIM'S HOUSE, WINTER - EVENING

In the dining room, Moza, holding a now-relaxed Philip, tries to clean the mess. She notices Jim.

MOZA

I got her out of here, at least.

But then Jim hears something in the kitchen. He walks over and sees her digging through the trash.

JIM

Stop!

Teresa turns and in her mouth is a diaper--Robin's--and smeared across half her face is shit.

Jim sees red. He launches forward, grabs Teresa, and thrusts her head under the sink, running the water.

Teresa screams.

Moza runs in, Philip on her hips. Philip starts to cry again, his massive hands and feet flexing in fear.

MOZA

Jim!

JIM

Fucking bitch got fucking shit all
on her...!

MOZA

JIM!

Teresa coughs and gags.

JIM

Don't you fucking go there with me,
Moza--I'm their father!

Moza moves in as Philip screeches.

MOZA

You're drowning her Jim, what the fuck!?

JIM

Do your job, let me do mine.

MOZA

Jim, let me handle this!

Just then, footsteps descend the staircase. Robin appears, plugging his ears. He steps to Jim gingerly, and places a disarming hand on his shoulder.

Jim has a moment where sense floods his system, but it's short lived. He pushes Robin, who falls on the floor alongside the cupboards. Moza makes to say something, but Jim flashes her a look that says she'd be next, Philip on her or not.

Moza goes to Robin as Jim shuts the water off.

TERESA

Goldfish, crackers, oatmeal--

Jim lets go of her and Teresa falls to the floor.

MOZA

Jim, please calm down--

JIM

Nah, fuck that! I didn't sign up for any this shit, none of it!

The tears that almost dropped earlier now came in full as he looks around and sees the damage done--damage started by him. His face contorts in horror as he realizes this.

MOZA

These are your children, Jim...

Jim then notices Teresa has slid away and is now in the pantry. She sees him notice her, and smiles. Her teeth are a smear-fest of feces and food.

Jim takes the nearest thing at hand (dish soap), and launches it at her as she makes it inside the pantry.

MOZA (CONT'D)

STOP!

Jim looks at Philip in Moza's hands.

JIM
That thing is a fucking freak.

He then looks at Robin.

JIM (CONT'D)
And he's not much better.

MOZA
You should be ashamed.

JIM
You're right. I am. I never
should've done any of this in the
first place. One clown was enough,
but I went and surrounded myself
with a full fucking circus? What
was I thinking?

MOZA
So what are you going to do about
it, then? Return them? These are
people, Jim, no matter what you
think.

Jim nods his head slowly.

JIM
One thing I can do is get some
answers. Real ones. Something I
should've done a long time ago.

Jim starts off toward his garage. But out of the corner of his eye, he sees Daniel. Jim gives him a thumbs up and a wink, then leaves.

We see Daniel point to everyone else, and give a thumbs down.

EXT. PALACE - NIGHT

Jim pulls up in a screech of tires, gets out of his truck, and goes to the Palace, shooting the door open. He goes inside.

INT. PALACE ABOVEGROUND - NIGHT

None of the women inside seem to register anything as he passes through.

Jim then shoots the door to the basement open. Mechanical sounds from below cover the sound of his gun.

INT. PALACE BELOWGROUND - NIGHT

Jim moves ahead towards Passenger's apartment in the back of the long hall. The door is ajar. Jim pushes it open, enters within.

And receives a PUNCH to the STOMACH by Driver, who was hiding just around the corner. Jim falls, his head hitting the floor hard. His nose breaks in a crunch.

DRIVER

Moth to a flame, bug to a web.

Driver picks up Jim's gun. He then points it at Jim.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Get up.

JIM

...give me a second...

Driver kicks Jim in the ribs.

DRIVER

There, I gave you a second. Want another?

Jim struggles up. Driver grabs him and pushes him forward, throwing him on the nearby couch.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Issues at home?

JIM

Yeah. Could say that. Where's Passenger?

DRIVER

Resting.

JIM

I want to see him.

DRIVER

I'm not enough?

JIM

Thought you two were a package deal.

Driver makes a face, as if saying, "That's not far from the truth."

DRIVER

Come, then. If you can. Bear in mind who's holding the pistol.

Jim gets up.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

First door on your right.

Jim goes and opens the door. A soft green-yellowish light surrounds the room, celestial-like.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Passenger, in all his glory.

Passenger is on a hospital bed wearing a vessel. His face is a rat's nest of wrinkles. He has aged tremendously.

JIM

Fuck's going on, here?

PASSENGER

Hello, Jim Simple. Few. More days.

DRIVER

Beautiful sight to behold, is it not?

Jim looks to Driver for answers, but Driver points with his chin at the far wall. The glow of a candle illuminates something of interest, something...familiar.

A deflated bag on the wall, with a plaque beneath it. Jim approaches it cautiously. He reads what's on it: FIRST VESSEL, BIRTH OF PASSENGER.

JIM

Passenger's your kid?

DRIVER

Born of my own seed, my own DNA. Two years ago. And the child within his vessel is mine, as well. My grandchild, I suppose you could say.

JIM

So...you run the show down here?

DRIVER

Yes.

JIM

Why hide that?

DRIVER

I hid nothing. Just never mentioned it.

JIM

So Passenger's your front man?

DRIVER

I prefer to say partner. Someone to take over when I'm gone. And he came out alright, wouldn't you say?

JIM

You were testing him.

DRIVER

In a way. But more testing the product. In fact, many trials remain before I attach another vessel to myself.

JIM

I was part of those trials?

DRIVER

Absolutely! You and your unique situation served my curiosity well, if nothing else.

JIM

But you don't even know anything about my situation, what I've been dealing with. How would you...

But Jim knows. His face shows it.

Driver nods his head, smiles a little bit.

JIM (CONT'D)

Moza. And that doctor.

DRIVER

You didn't hire them, remember. I did, on your behalf. As you had requested. My good lady Moza sent me video after video after video. Was like I was there.

Jim is disturbed but tries not to show it. Jim looks at Passenger.

JIM

What do you think about all this? All he just said?

PASSENGER

I live to serve my father. His will is mine.

DRIVER

What a declaration! See, Mr. Simple, to a child, the parent is their first God. Perhaps their most important God. Passenger's life is mine. He prays at the altar of me.

JIM

Listen, fuck what you got going on here. All I care about is what's happening at my place. Is there anything that can be done? I'm not above begging, here. I'm desperate.

DRIVER

There is nothing I can do, I'm afraid. Just enjoy what you have while you have it--which in this case, isn't your children. It's your life.

Jim tenses. His eyes search for a weapon: they fall on the candle beneath the first vessel.

JIM

What are you saying?

DRIVER

I'm saying you're going to now become an experiment. Just like your beloved wife. What, I wonder, would result from a vessel attached to a recently deceased individual? I'd love to find out.

Driver raises the pistol as Jim grabs the candle and launches it across the room. It connects with Driver's face, which causes one of his eyeballs to pop out of his head and roll near Jim. Jim stomps on it as he runs forward and spears Driver in the midsection.

The pistol fires, but the shot is wide. Jim and Driver wrestle around on the floor, hitting each other, fighting vigorously over control of the gun.

Jim manages to get control of the gun, but just then something gets control of him. Jim is launched across the room.

Passenger is up, one hand helping Driver stand, the other holding onto the vessel. Wires and coils slip off the bed as Passenger stands in front of Driver.

Jim, tired of talking, aims his gun and pulls the trigger.

Passenger gets it right in the forehead. He crumples to the floor as the vessel squashes like a grape. Fluid gushes across the floor and the form of a small, black child flows forward, its umbilical cord trailing behind it like a lifeless snake. The child doesn't move or make a sound.

Driver freezes, remaining eye in opened disbelief.

JIM
See the crow?

Driver is about to answer but another bullet fires and punches through his remaining eye.

Driver collapses, dead.

Jim gets up and leaves the Palace.

INT. JIM'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Back in his truck, Jim sees a few missed calls from Moza. He tries calling back, but the line is dead.

Jim speeds home.

EXT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jim's truck flies into the garage. He gets out and limps into his house. He senses something is wrong.

INT. JIM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

JIM
Moza?

No response. All is quiet.

Jim enters his kitchen and sees Teresa on the floor. Dishwasher pods are stuffed into her mouth. She's not moving, not eating...and so Jim knows she is dead.

JIM (CONT'D)
MOZA!

Jim scrambles upstairs. On the floor, holding Philip, is Moza. Both of their throats are slit. Blood is everywhere.

Jim leaps ahead, going room to room. At last, he enters Robin's.

Inside, he sees Daniel threatening a cornered Robin with a blood-drenched butcher's knife. Robin has a few cuts. Distressed and in pain, he shakes uncontrollably.

Daniel registers Jim, who looks between both Daniel and Robin.

DANIEL

I fixed. Who you hated.

ROBIN

Daddy. Scared.

We see Jim aim his gun, but we can't quite tell at who, because the camera pulls back, turns, and focuses on the door to the attic.

Jim lets out a painful scream as a gunshot rings out. A body thumps down onto the floor.

CUT TO BLACK.