

A LIFE IN THIN AIR

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

A plexiglass barrier on a desk twists the sunlight around the room like a prism onto a young family of three.

They're stationed six feet apart and masked per requirements.

JUDITH (17), an angsty teenager that broods a leave me alone attitude, drowns out the world with her ear buds wearing a hoodie sweatshirt that encompasses her like a blanket.

JUDITH

This is ridiculous. They know we
live together.

She pulls down the mask then wilts tired and worn out drawing flowers in black dry erase marker on the arm of the chair.

ERIC (43), the kind of everyman you might have a beer with on occasion, reads a magazine from the clump stretched out on a coffee table.

STEFANIE (41), the mirror image of Judith with streaks of gray hairs you only notice if you're close, rips off the mask then paces in a hot mess of tears and anxiety.

Judith focuses on the worry in her mother's expression.

ERIC

Come on, Stef. Can you just sit
down for a moment?

STEFANIE

This is it.

ERIC

Why? Her last check up was fine.

JUDITH

You know, I'm right here.

Eric slaps down the magazine then anchors himself in front of Stefanie.

ERIC

Stop.

STEFANIE

I can't shut it off.

ERIC
Can you slow down?

STEFANIE
We'll have to protect her from
everything.

ERIC
You can't keep her isolated
forever.

JUDITH
I know, right.

THE DOCTOR, proudly sporting scrubs and a name badge that displays "THEY, THEM, THEIR" pronouns, knocks and enters.

Stefanie peers through their facemask and face shield to get a read. Nothing.

ERIC
So... what's the news?

Behind the barrier, they remove the face shield with a thud, distressed.

DOCTOR
Her eGFR is below 15. We thought it
could be a mistake but....

ERIC
What's that all mean?

DOCTOR
She's going to need a transplant.

Stefanie turns then covers her face unable to deal with the situation.

Eric comforts her but is shoved away.

ERIC
How long do we have?

DOCTOR
If we're lucky, a couple of years.

ERIC
There has to be more we can do.

DOCTOR
Other than Dialysis? Wait and hope.

The doctor shakes their head "No".

ERIC

Would I be able to donate?

STEFANIE

We've talked about this.

DOCTOR

A paternal match is better. Or
someone with a matching blood type.
You're neither.

Judith closes her eyes, aggravated, then intensifies the volume of her ear buds. She draws a small tombstone in-between the flowers.

The music blares as they talk it out.

Judith places the marker into her hoodie pocket then mimics the piano track onto her knees for a perfect match.

A little over a year later.

INT. HOUSE - JUDITH'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Happy eighteenth birthday balloons float aimlessly around the room to read eighty-one.

Judith slouches on the bed in the same hoodie. It's faded with wear and sports a tear on the back.

A variety of kidney and headache medications highlight the top of a dresser.

Judith scrolls through her phone. Her ear buds drown out the world. She finds a recipient (DAD/ERIC).

Judith (TEXT) **She's on the moon today. Can you pick me up?**

Eric (TEXT) **I'm already waiting outside.**

The horn from Eric's old truck chirps in the distance.

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY - EARLY MORNING

Judith tiptoes past Stefanie's bedroom then peeks in.

Stefanie weeps quietly into a pillow then turns away when their eyes meet.

Judith wipes the door casing with her sleeve to draw a crescent moon in dry erase marker.

EXT. HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - EARLY MORNING

The steep mountain peaks conceal this small town in the middle of nowhere Colorado.

Eric blasts the heat in his old Ford F150 truck while he waits.

Judith races to the truck to avoid the cold air. She jumps in with a slam of the door.

ERIC
Hey, easy on the truck.

INT. TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Eric, annoyed, taps her shoulder with the back of his hand.

Judith shrugs.

Eric yanks out an ear bud from Judith.

ERIC
Hello?

He scorns her with a look.

JUDITH
OK.

Judith removes the other ear bud.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
Happy?

ERIC
It's a start.

JUDITH
Then what?

ERIC
Just talk to me.

JUDITH
Can we just go?

Eric hits the gas pedal and they're off.

INT./EXT. TRUCK - TRAVELLING - EARLY MORNING

Eric plays with the radio to find a good station. A familiar song comes on. He hums to the beat.

ERIC

Didn't you sing this all the time?

JUDITH

I don't know. It's just a song.

The radio crackles.

ERIC

Yeah, maybe. But I still remember you singing it as loud as you could.

JUDITH

That was a long time ago.

ERIC

Maybe for you. Didn't you see her in concert?

JUDITH

You know mom would never let me go.

Silence fills the truck followed by static pops of the radio teetering back to life.

ERIC

Maybe next time she's in Denver. We...

JUDITH

I can always watch it on YouTube.

ERIC

But that isn't the same. There's more to life than what you can watch on your phone.

JUDITH

(Under her breath)

It's all I have.

ERIC

You know I'm here for you. No matter what.

He holds out a pinky for a pinky swear.

JUDITH
I'm not six anymore.

Judith conceals a half smile then taps her foot as she searches for the rhythm and words again. She draws a shining Sun on the door.

Eric enjoys the moment no matter how brief it might be.

EXT. MEDICAL CENTER - EARLY MORNING

A brick building, the largest in the town, stands three stories tall with patches of paint to cover old sign placements.

The old F150 stops in front.

ERIC
Just text me when you need a ride back.

JUDITH
I'll be fine. I need to "keep active" anyway.

Judith exits with a slam of the door behind her.

ERIC
HEY. Easy on the truck!

Judith glimpses an old Jeep Wrangler with a hardtop that looks like it's seen better days. The paint has cracked with heat damage and the tires don't seem to match.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER - TREATMENT ROOM - MORNING

The DIALYSIS MACHINE hums in use.

Judith listens to music and scribbles into a wire bound college ruled notebook. Her left hand holds tubes covered by her hoodie sleeve.

Judith's notebook looks plastered with random thoughts and ideas. Every edge of the page has been used, yet she finds more space to write.

VANESSA (58), the nurse, enters. Her scrubs have a few buttons with positive quotes that reflects her wise old owl vibe.

VANESSA
Hey, how are you doing?

JUDITH

I'm ok.

Judith hides her arm before Vanessa can examine it.

VANESSA

Would you mind if I take a look?

JUDITH

It still hurts.

Vanessa points to a button on her scrubs that says "B+".

Judith avoids the view of her arm.

Vanessa rolls up the sleeve. She rolls it down when she's finished examining then checks the machine's operation.

VANESSA

It's fine. It's doing exactly what it's supposed to do. Any word from the doctor about a transplant?

JUDITH

Still waiting.

VANESSA

Any updates?

JUDITH

(Under her breath)
Still dyin'.

Judith shrugs.

Vanessa taps her on the shoulder to get her out of her doldrums.

VANESSA

Still writing?

Judith lights up with the question.

JUDITH

Yeah.

VANESSA

When are you going to play something for me?

JUDITH

I don't know. There's only like one piano around here.

VANESSA

Please. I want to be able to say I
knew you when...

JUDITH

I have to survive first.

Vanessa points to her "B+" button again.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

Mind if I head up to the roof
later?

Vanessa points to another button on her scrubs that says "You
got this".

VANESSA

As long as I'm on your guest list.

EXT. MEDICAL CENTER - ROOF - DAY

The flat rooftop with insulation rocks and steel roof ventilators is Judith's oasis. All the town can be seen from its vantage point. The view of the mountains makes the small town feel even smaller. A director's chair awaits her getaway time.

Judith breezes onto the roof with a rare smile.

She sees the Jeep as it drives off.

Judith moves the chair into place then studies the words on her notebook. She closes her eyes and mimics playing on a piano.

EXT. SMALL MOUNTAIN TOWN - AFTERNOON

Judith blares the sound on her ear buds as she walks through town. She uses short breaks to not overexert herself then looks into a couple of shop windows.

Most people ignore or deliberately avoid interacting with Judith.

A girl roughly Judith's age purposely steps away.

Judith closes her eyes and mimics a death emoji.

TEENAGE GIRL

That's not funny.

EXT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP - AFTERNOON

It's an old coffee shop with aging counter tops and not many visitors just outside of town.

OLLIE (52), a cook with all the grease in the kitchen wiped onto his apron, notices Judith passing by the window. He knocks to get her attention.

Judith pulls out her ear buds when she sees him jumping. She waves for him to come outside.

Ollie's hands push back a "No" before hollering back through the window.

OLLIE

She's not calling out is she?

A shrug of her shoulders says "I don't know."

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Judith enters to eerie quiet.

Dirty dishes fill the sink.

JUDITH

Mom?

Judith tiptoes through the house to the hallway.

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Judith reaches the hallway to peek into Stefanie's bedroom.

Nothing has changed.

JUDITH

Don't you work tonight?

Judith snaps on the light and draws a sad face emoji onto the casing under the crescent moon.

INT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Stefanie wipes the counters and keeps busy with side work.

Eric enters, watches for a moment, then rests at the main counter.

ERIC
Can we talk?

STEFANIE
It isn't going to change anything.

ERIC
Don't be like that.

Stefanie wraps silverware into napkins.

STEFANIE
Don't blame me for this?

ERIC
Can you stop?

STEFANIE
I'm working.

ERIC
There's nobody here.

Her pace accelerates with every wrap.

STEFANIE
There will be.

ERIC
Who?

Eric surveys the nearly empty coffee shop.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Stef. Please, don't make me the bad
guy.

STEFANIE
We don't need to be rescued.

ERIC
Are you sure about that?

Stefanie dumps the silverware onto the counter then rushes to the restroom.

Ollie pops his head through the two-way door.

OLLIE
Come on man. Don't leave me a
fuckin' hurricane.

ERIC
Sorry.

INT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Stefanie rushes into a stall and dials a number on a cell phone. She shakes from anxiety.

STEFANIE
Come on. Pick up.

INTERCUT

INT. VANESSA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Vanessa wakes with the vibration of her phone on the nightstand. She views the ID of the caller.

VANESSA
It's late.

STEFANIE
I know. I just can't stop this feeling.

VANESSA
You know I'm a nurse.

STEFANIE
I don't know who else to talk to.

VANESSA
That's why I gave you that book.

STEFANIE
It isn't helping.

VANESSA
There isn't much else I can do.

STEFANIE
What can I do?

VANESSA
Tell Ollie to stop burning my hash browns.

STEFANIE
Come on really?

VANESSA
Stef. I get it. I can see how much stress this puts on you. But, you gotta figure it out like everyone else. You got this.

STEFANIE
I should just focus on Jude.

VANESSA
Maybe you shouldn't.

STEFANIE
Why?

VANESSA
I think you know why.

STEFANIE
It's just easier to focus on
someone else.

VANESSA
But, what does that do for you?

STEFANIE
I know.

INT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Stefanie returns from the bathroom still frenzied. She searches for Eric.

OLLIE
He's gone.

STEFANIE
Stop burning Vanessa's hash browns.

OLLIE
She likes them crispy.

INT. HOUSE - JUDITH'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Stefanie rattles chairs and vacuums the living room.

Judith pulls back the hood of her sweatshirt to listen.

She cracks the door and glances into the living room.

Judith hops back into bed with a push of her ear buds into place.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Stefanie cleans and organizes literally covering the same spots over and over. She stops at the drawings on the door jamb, her expression softens.

Judith's door rustles and Stefanie rushes back to the living room.

Judith stops at Stefanie's room to erase the door jamb and draw something new.

Stefanie catches her, questions driven by mania.

STEFANIE

What are you doodling?

JUDITH

It's nothing.

STEFANIE

How are you? Is everything ok?

JUDITH

I'm fine.

STEFANIE

Do you want me to make breakfast?

JUDITH

NO. I'm okay.

STEFANIE

Let me wash that hoodie and fix that tear.

JUDITH

MOM. I just washed it the other day anyway.

A honk from outside grabs their attention.

STEFANIE

Why is he here?

JUDITH

Why do you think?

Judith rushes out the door.

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY - MORNING

Stefanie finds the drawing on the doorjamb. It's a raincloud complete with lightning, rain, and wind.

She wipes it off with her thumb.

EXT. MOUNTAIN WOODS - BEHIND THE COFFEE SHOP - MORNING

A beautiful landscape of trees towers over the coffee shop. A large mountain looms behind it. There's a small path outlined through the trees down to a river not far away.

The old Jeep Wrangler parks and the occupant exits.

JAMES (22) shy, quiet, boyish for his age, but hardened by life experiences, breathes in the air with a cough.

He removes an old picture of his mother from his wallet of her somewhere in the mountains. It has a hospital admissions wristband dated twelve years earlier stapled to it. Under his mother's name reads "Acute Hypoxia".

James walks the path and takes in all the beauty.

JAMES

My turn.

James finds the river's edge to rest and catch his breath.

A whitetail fawn thrashes in the water unable to raise itself above the edge. It calls out distressed.

James races to pull the fawn from the water.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Come on. It's ok.

He sights a growing rapid in the distance.

The fawn's mother huffs at James still holding the fawn. James sets the fawn down and it jumps away.

The mother locks eyes with James. He closes his eyes.

The mother prances away with the sound of a piano in the distance.

James searches for the sound then peels off the mud and leaves from his zip up hoodie.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - STAGE - DAY

The stage, hidden behind some old curtains overlooking a basketball court, seems forgotten in time with dust on a piano and other musical equipment.

Judith props her phone onto a stand carved out of discarded Styrofoam. She grabs two stress balls from the piano to squeeze and stretch her fingers.

Judith lifts the fallboard and presses a few keys to check the tune then opens her notebook to play.

JUDITH

I can do this.

She presses record on the phone.

{Note: This song should be an original that is reflective of Judith's creative spirit. Inspiration for this moment is a the song EET - BY Regina Spektor.}

Judith stops abruptly wincing in pain. She moves to the open back door then leans against the opening to massage her wrist.

Kids, in the distance, fight over a toy as the parents come to break them up.

Judith shakes her fingers then heads back to the piano.

She writes a few more lines into the notebook. With a deep breath, Judith restarts.

The piano can be heard across the stage through the open doors of the high school gymnasium.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - STAGE EXIT - CONTINUOUS

The back of the stage has a set of steps for access.

Music echoes into the yard.

The sound draws James in for a closer listen. He ascends the steps to the edge of the door. James quivers with emotion.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Judith fights through the pain to complete the song.

She crosses her arms over her chest then taps to match her heartbeat. Her breathing calms and demeanor relaxes.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - STAGE EXIT - CONTINUOUS

James, lost in memories, turns to descend but stops. James ponders a moment then removes his dirtied hoodie and ties it around his waist.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - STAGE - CONTINUOUS

There's a knock on the door.

JUDITH
HOLY SHIT BALLS!!

Judith wildly jumps to her feet.

JAMES
I didn't mean to scare you.

JUDITH
You know this is a school, right?

JAMES
I know. It sounded pretty good.
Just thought I'd see..

Judith smiles.

JUDITH
Really?

James coughs. He finds his breath and the coughing subsides.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
Are you okay?

James nods then steps close to examine the piano. He touches a few keys.

Judith resists the urge to step back intrigued by him.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
Do you play?

JAMES
Not really. Do you post online?

JUDITH
No.

JAMES

I was hoping to hear more.

JUDITH

I've never thought about posting.

JAMES

Why not?

JUDITH

I didn't think anyone would want to listen.

JAMES

I would.

Judith smiles when she reviews his cute features.

JUDITH

I guess I'll see you around?

James changes his focus from the piano to Judith.

JAMES

Maybe.

He half smiles and walks to the exit.

JUDITH

Thanks.

JAMES

For?

JUDITH

Never mind.

James exits.

EXT. HIGHWAY REST STOP - NIGHT

It's a little outlet for drivers to rest then get back onto the road. The school is visible in the distance.

The Jeep hides at the end of the row. The bad suspension rocks from movement inside.

James, reclined in the passenger seat, shivers unable to sleep with the sound of the piano echoing in his head.

CUT TO:

INT. LAS VEGAS STAGE PIT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A cleaner version of James plays guitar for a Las Vegas production.

AVA (22), a beautiful piano player with soft features and delicate hands, plays across from him and smiles.

The music stops for an intermission.

Ava steps close to James.

AVA
You're not worried.

JAMES
About?

AVA
There is almost no one out there.

JAMES
It'll pass. People are just making more of it than it needs to be.

AVA
It's starting to stress me out.

JAMES
I've got you.

AVA
Promise?

JAMES
Of course.

Sounds of loud knocks on a front door wakes James from his sleep.

BACK TO:

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY - MORNING

Judith tiptoes through the hallway to peer into Stefanie's bedroom.

The room is empty and the house is quiet.

Judith sees the door casing has been cleaned and bites her lip then draws a happy face with a question mark next to it.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Stefanie quietly reads a book on coping with anxiety. She seems tempered and even keeled.

Judith cautiously approaches then breaks the quiet.

JUDITH
No cleaning?

STEFANIE
Hey. You're up.

JUDITH
That's what typically happens when
I WAKE up.

STEFANIE
How are you feeling?

JUDITH
I'm fine.

STEFANIE
Is your wrist ok?

Stefanie reaches for Judith's arm to check on it.

JUDITH
I told you I'm fine.

Judith pulls it away.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
What we really should be asking is
if YOU'RE fine.

STEFANIE
So, sometimes I'm a little moody.

JUDITH
A little?

STEFANIE
Yes. A little.

JUDITH
You don't see it?

STEFANIE
What?

JUDITH

Hmm.. Let's see. The mood swings,
the mania, the nights you seem to
move furniture like it's never good
enough.

STEFANIE

You have no idea what you're
talking about. Or what you think
you know.

JUDITH

Then explain it to me.

STEFANIE

I wish I could. You don't know what
it's like for me.

JUDITH

Clearly.

Judith pushes in her ear buds and rushes out the door.

INT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

James enters and seats himself at the lunch counter. He sets
down a wire bound college ruled notebook similar to Judith's
then picks up a menu. James examines his wallet to see only a
few dollars.

Stefanie notices.

STEFANIE

How are you tonight?

James smiles and nods back.

Stefanie carefully keeps a six foot distance.

She observes his zip up sweatshirt still dirty from the fawn.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

Can I help you?

James finds the cheapest deal on the menu.

JAMES

May I get a coffee and some
pancakes?

STEFANIE

Decaf?

JAMES

Just regular coffee is fine.

She pours a cup then gently slides it over.

James reaches for the cream and sugar.

STEFANIE

Can I get you anything else?

JAMES

No. I'm fine.

STEFANIE

Just some pancakes Ollie.

OLLIE (O.S.)

Coming up.

James reaches for his notebook. He writes with much more structure and organized intent.

He struggles to breathe.

STEFANIE

Are you okay?

JAMES

Excuse me?

STEFANIE

Are you feeling alright? You look a little...

JAMES

Sorry. There was a deer that fell into the river. I haven't washed my shirt.

STEFANIE

You jumped in the river to save a deer?

JAMES

A fawn really. And it was just at the edge.

STEFANIE

Locals don't even jump into the river.

OLLIE (O.S.)

Too cold.

The order bell rings and Ollie slides a plate of pancakes under a heat lamp.

STEFANIE

Syrup?

James nods his head for a "yes".

Stefanie squeezes the syrup then slides the plate still careful to keep her distance.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

Here you go.

Stefanie goes back to her side work.

James hides a wry smile.

INT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

James's head droops as he falls asleep at the counter. He fights to keep his eyes open but they get heavier.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE LAS VEGAS STRIP - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

James tunes an old acoustic guitar. The open case sits a few steps away. The case has layers of stickers ranging from Pokémon on the bottom layer to band and venue stickers on the top. The most noticeable is "Ava & J" in complex lettering like a tattoo.

James strums the guitar for a small crowd of onlookers. He plays a song with a noticeable talent.

A few onlookers dump a few coins and bills into the case. Others don't even acknowledge he's there.

OFFICER DANIELS, a seasoned police officer, listens intently for a few moments with surprise. He's hit by a moment of recognition.

FLASH - James, distraught, pushes tears from his face in an apartment.

OFFICER DANIELS

Do you have a permit to be out here?

James nervously strums the guitar and stares at the ground.

JAMES
Can I help you officer?

OFFICER DANIELS
Remember me?

James shrugs his shoulders.

OFFICER DANIELS (CONT'D)
You're talented. But you look like
your one bad night from something
terrible.

JAMES
Do you know what it's been like for
me?

James packs his guitar then scatters change and bills across
the floor.

Officer Daniels picks up some of the bills. He pulls out
another \$200.00 from his wallet.

JAMES (CONT'D)
You don't.

Officer Daniels places the money in James's hand.

OFFICER DANIELS
Take this.

James reluctantly accepts it but struggles to give it back.

JAMES
I don't need your charity.

OFFICER DANIELS
Trust me. You do.

Officer Daniels steps away with his partner.

His partner shakes his head.

James, fully packed, rushes from the street.

BACK TO:

INT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Stefanie cleans continuously. It's as if she doesn't have an
off switch.

Ollie knocks in the kitchen pass-through. He throws a cleaning towel at Stefanie.

OLLIE
Hey. Stef.

Stefanie looks back.

STEFANIE
What?

OLLIE
Don't rub the counters to the floor.

STEFANIE
What are you talking about?

OLLIE
Look at yourself.

STEFANIE
I'm just working.

OLLIE
It's already clean.

Stefanie stops to look at some of the counters worn in circles like they've been cleaned over and over.

STEFANIE
I did all this?

Ollie hold his hands out like he's not going to get into it then steps away from the window.

Stefanie steps to the two way door.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
Don't run away from me.

OLLIE
Sometimes you over do it.

STEFANIE
Why haven't you said something before?

OLLIE
Why do you think?

Stefanie steps back to the counter disappointed. She notices James asleep.

OLLIE (CONT'D)
He can't sleep here.

STEFANIE
Shut up.

OLLIE
Wake him up.

STEFANIE
Don't worry about it. It looks like
he needs it.

The sound of loud knocks on a front door wakes James as Ollie purposely drops a pot in the kitchen.

James, startled, shakes his head to wake then knocks over a coffee cup.

JAMES
Shit.

STEFANIE
Let me help you.

Stefanie, with a moist towel, wipes down the counter top.

JAMES
Sorry.

STEFANIE
It's okay. It's not your fault.

Stefanie cleans the mess then throws the towel into the kitchen.

OLLIE (O.S.)
Missed me.

JAMES
What was that about?

STEFANIE
He saw you falling asleep.

Stefanie, apologetic, steadies herself.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
But really, you can't sleep here.
I'm sorry.

JAMES
It's alright. I'll leave.

James yawns and stretches.

STEFANIE

There's a motel 6 about ten miles from here if you need to get some sleep.

JAMES

How much do I owe you?

STEFANIE

Don't worry about it.

JAMES

That isn't how it works.

James pulls the last of his money and lays it on the counter.

Stefanie reaches for his notebook.

STEFANIE

My daughter has something similar.

JAMES

I hope not.

James frowns and hides a sadness in his eyes.

STEFANIE

I'm really sorry.

JAMES

Why? You aren't kicking me out.

STEFANIE

I just feel like I am.

JAMES

Don't worry. This is a coffee shop not a motel. I get it.

Stefanie watches James walk to his Jeep.

STEFANIE

You're such a jerk.

OLLIE

What? You kicked him out.

EXT. MOUNTAIN WOODS - BEHIND THE COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

James focuses back into the coffee shop from his Jeep. He writes into his notebook.

JAMES (V.O.)
It's a thousand cuts. Small little
breaths that cry out. How long will
this take?

James turns the ignition but the Jeep sputters and stops.

Again, he tries.

Again, it sputters.

James taps at the gas gauge that reads empty.

His eyes droop tired and off to sleep.

JAMES
Please.

James coughs wildly again.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

Stefanie practices meditation exercises.

Judith storms in to grab a couple bites of breakfast.

STEFANIE
You're still not ready.

JUDITH
How ready do I really have to be?

STEFANIE
Washing that sweatshirt would help.

Judith storms off.

There's a knock at the front door and Eric enters.

Stefanie's tension overrides her exercises.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
Why are you here?

ERIC
I'm here for Jude.

STEFANIE
I can take her.

Stefanie steams over to the empty sink to wash dishes.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
I need to be able to do this.

ERIC
I'm just trying to help.

STEFANIE
Are you saying I'm helpless?

ERIC
You just have a lot going on.

STEFANIE
I can manage this.

ERIC
Then why does she text me?

Stefanie crosses her arms to hold it together.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Look, I don't want to fight. I just
want take Jude to a movie or a
concert this weekend.

Judith peeks into the kitchen then turns away to listen.

STEFANIE
And expose her to all those people?

ERIC
You bring strangers here all the
time.

STEFANIE
That's different.

ERIC
How? You don't owe anyone a thing.

STEFANIE
It's something I feel need to do.

ERIC
What do you think she needs?

Eric stares at Stefanie in silence then walks away and out
the door.

INT./EXT. TRUCK - TRAVELLING - MORNING

Silence fills the truck.

ERIC
What's going on between you two?

JUDITH
You already know.

ERIC
I'm just concerned.

JUDITH
Don't. I get enough of it from mom.

ERIC
I get it.

JUDITH
I think I have the right to live my
life. What I have left of it
anyway.

ERIC
You don't have to be alone in all
of it either.

JUDITH
I am.

Eric silences himself because it won't make a dent.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
I'll figure this out.

The truck stops.

ERIC
We could still go to a movie this
weekend.

JUDITH
She won't let me.

Judith exits with a slam of the door behind her.

Eric shakes his head.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - STAGE - DAY

Judith practices different finger exercises on the piano. She
takes short breaks to massage her wrist.

James knocks on the open door.

JUDITH
HOLY SHIT BALLS!!

The piano stool falls over as Judith jumps to her feet.

JAMES
Sorry. I didn't want to scare you.
Again. Would it be ok if I came in?

Judith considers it but is hesitant.

JAMES (CONT'D)
It's ok. I'll go touch grass.

James frowns and turns.

JUDITH
I'm sorry. I haven't really played
for anyone.

JAMES
Why?

JUDITH
Scared to I guess.

JAMES
You're better than most performers
I've seen.

JUDITH
Am I?

Judith places the stool in place and sits at the piano.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
Come in.

Judith taps at the piano keys.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
I don't know many songs.

JAMES
Play what you know.

JUDITH
Would you play something for me?

JAMES
I can't.

JUDITH
Please.

JAMES
I don't have my guitar.

Judith points to a case not far away.

JUDITH
There's a guitar over there. I've never seen anyone play it.

JAMES
If I play for you, will you post what you play for me?

A moment of fear overtakes Judith.

JUDITH
What if nobody likes it?

JAMES
Some people won't.

JUDITH
How do you really know I'm that good?

JAMES
Because I've performed...

James cuts himself off.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I just recognize your talent.

JUDITH
Have you posted anything online?

JAMES
Not in a while.

JUDITH
Share your Insta with me? I'll post my song.

James hesitantly nods.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
Shake on it?

Judith covers her hand with her sleeve and shyly reaches out for his.

James returns his hand.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
I'm Jude by the way.

JAMES
James.

Judith scans through her notebook to pick a song.

James grabs the guitar case then finds a seat.

JUDITH
Don't judge.

Judith breathes deeply in and out to calm herself, hits record on the phone, and with some hesitation plays.

{Note: These songs will be original songs. Judith's song is hopeful but has a hint of despair behind her words. James's song is shaped by loss and feels like he's singing about an ex-girlfriend. The tone should be close to Older Than I Am - By Lennon Stella and Arms Around You by Jamie Grey.}

Stunned by her talent, James applauds.

Judith blushes and smiles ear to ear.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
Your turn.

James removes the guitar and tunes it. He strums it to check the sound.

JAMES
Don't judge.

James plays a song that's equally as good. He coughs and destroys the vocals at the end.

JUDITH
Are you sure you're ok?

JAMES
I'm fine.

JUDITH
That was amazing till you blew the last few parts. I was going to stand up and clap but... you know the coughing kind of killed it.

JAMES
Yeah.. Story of my life I guess.

James packs the guitar and sets it aside.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Keep it up. You could be really great.

JUDITH
We can only hope.

JAMES
I mean it.

JUDITH
So did I.

James pauses at the door.

JAMES
I'll leave you to it.

Judith holds out her phone.

JUDITH
What's your Insta?

James views her Instagram screenname and types it into his phone.

JAMES
Shared. It's not much.

JUDITH
Will I see you again?

James turns back with a wry smile then pushes his head down to leave.

INT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP - AFTERNOON

A few guests are scattered across the coffee shop. This is about as busy as it gets.

Stefanie enters for her shift.

STEFANIE
Hey, Ollie?

OLLIE
Yeah? What's up?

STEFANIE
Has that Jeep been out back all day?

OLLIE
I don't know. I've been working.

STEFANIE
Has the guy from the other night
been in?

OLLIE
No. Why?

STEFANIE
No reason.

OLLIE
You know, Eric's going to be mad if
you take in another stranger.

STEFANIE
I don't care.

OLLIE
I'm just saying. You can't help
everyone.

STEFANIE
I can help you.

Stefanie tosses Ollie a clean apron.

CUT TO:

INT. LAS VEGAS STAGE PIT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

James strums his guitar.

Ava races out of a backroom in a panic. She moves erratically
around the pit.

James carefully sets down the guitar.

JAMES
Hey. Calm down. What's wrong?

AVA
There's no more work. They're going
to stay dark into next year.

JAMES
We'll get through this.

AVA
How?

JAMES
They'll start opening back up.

AVA
We can't just wait and hope.

JAMES
We'll get through this.

Loud knocks on a door snaps James to attention.

BACK TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY REST STOP - AFTERNOON

James daydreams while strumming his guitar.

He watches different people enter the rest stop and park then shivers with a thrust of cold air.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - STAGE - AFTERNOON

Judith closes the fallboard on the piano.

She reviews her video.

JUDITH
Here goes nothing.

Judith hits post on a YouTube profile.

She switches over to a notification on her Instagram.

Judith hits play.

ON THE VIDEO - James and Ava perform.

JAMES
(On Video)
Sure you don't want to be in this?

AVA
(On Video)
This is your audition.

{Note: This song is James playing guitar with lead vocals and Ava playing piano off camera.}

The screen glows in Judith's eyes. She smiles in amazement.

INT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP - AFTERNOON

Stefanie fixates on her side work then attends to guests needs. When she has a moment to rest, her emotions run hot and cold.

James enters and finds a booth to lay low.

Ollie pops his head out of the kitchen to get Stefanie's attention.

OLLIE

Hey. Stef. You called it.

Stefanie recognizes James at one of the booths. He blankly stares out the window.

STEFANIE

Hey. Sorry about the other night.

JAMES

No need to apologize.

Stefanie grabs a clean glass and a pitcher of water to bring to the booth.

STEFANIE

Coffee and pancakes?

JAMES

No thanks.

STEFANIE

Water?

James nods.

Stefanie pours a glass.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

I felt I was being mean the other night.

JAMES

I was really tired. It won't happen again.

STEFANIE

Are you sure I can't get you anything?

James shakes his head "No" then sips the water.

Stefanie returns the pitcher back onto the counter.

INT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

James sips at the water to enjoy the warmth of the building.

STEFANIE

Is that your Jeep out back?

James stares off into the distance.

Stefanie waits for an answer.

JAMES

Yeah. Is it ok to be parked out there?

STEFANIE

I'm sorry. I was just curious.

James doesn't respond.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

Are you staying with someone?

Eric enters and sees Stefanie with James.

Ollie, spatula in hand, looks ready to start a fight.

OLLIE

Are you here to cause a mess?

ERIC

I ordered a special. Who's the kid?

OLLIE

Fuck if I know. But, he's been here a couple of days this week and hasn't ordered shit today. Better watch out. She might take in a stray again.

Eric rushes to interrupt her conversation.

ERIC

Can we talk?

STEFANIE

This has to stop.

Stefanie pushes away.

Eric chases down Stefanie at the lunch counter.

ERIC
Ollie tells me he hasn't ordered
anything?

STEFANIE
He just did.

ERIC
Stef. Really?

Stefanie pulls a plate of food from under the heat lamp and
yells through the kitchen pass-through.

STEFANIE
I need another special.

ERIC
That's mine.

STEFANIE
Not anymore.

ERIC
You can't just help every random
stranger that pops in here.

Stefanie steps around Eric to reach James's booth.

STEFANIE
Here's your order.

James looks befuddled.

A smirk and a look back at Eric.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
Compliments of him.

Stefanie reverses back to Eric.

James watches them argue.

ERIC
Okay. I get that you need to do
this sometimes. But...

STEFANIE
I should just let him go sleep in
his car tonight?

ERIC
You don't know that.

STEFANIE

I need this.

ERIC

If I can't take Judith out to have a life, outside of this place, you can't give strangers a free pass.

STEFANIE

Watch me.

Their voices are muffled to James as he strains to listen.

Stefanie points at the door and Eric finally leaves. She returns to James.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry about that.

JAMES

Are you ok?

Stefanie, taken aback, questions herself to answer.

STEFANIE

No one has really asked me that in a while.

JAMES

Why?

STEFANIE

Long story.

Stefanie still keeps a careful distance between herself and James.

JAMES

Is there something wrong? I can leave if you don't want me here.

STEFANIE

No, nothing like that. I'm just cautious around people I don't know.

Stefanie peers into James's eyes.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

What brought you here?

JAMES

It's nothing.

STEFANIE
Running from something?

JAMES
Maybe.

STEFANIE
Where are you going?

JAMES
Nowhere. Just driving.

STEFANIE
Driving?

JAMES
I don't know what to say. I got
into my Jeep a couple of days ago
and just felt like...

STEFANIE
Getting away?

James nervously eyes the exit.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
Am I bothering you?

JAMES
I'm not used to being questioned.

Stefanie rolls silverware into napkins.

STEFANIE
More water?

JAMES
Sure.

Stefanie pours James another glass.

James appears lost in his thoughts.

EXT. MOUNTAIN WOODS - BEHIND THE COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

James shivers and holds his arms close to keep warm.

Stefanie approaches with a gas can.

James lowers the window.

STEFANIE
Do you need a place to stay?

JAMES

I'll be fine.

STEFANIE

It's going to get cold out here. I don't know if sleeping in your car is the best thing to do.

James brushes it off like it won't matter.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

I have a place you can sleep.

JAMES

Why would you do that?

STEFANIE

Where else are you going to go?

JAMES

I couldn't repay you.

STEFANIE

I could use some help around the house.

James debates with himself to accept.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

What other options do you have?

James realizes that she isn't going to take "No" for an answer. He gives in to her demand.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

Have you ever had the measles or chicken pox, COVID?

JAMES

Hasn't everyone had those once. I'm pretty sure I'm vaccinated.

STEFANIE

It's nothing.

Stefanie pushes the gas to him.

JAMES

How did you know?

STEFANIE

I've seen it happen a few times.

Stefanie looks back with a wry smile and waves for him to follow.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MIDNIGHT

Judith's phone glows in the darkness of the room.

Stefanie hears the loud music coming from Judith's ear buds. She clicks the lights on.

JUDITH
You're home early.

STEFANIE
It's almost midnight. You should be in bed.

Stefanie searches a drawer.

JUDITH
What are you looking for?

STEFANIE
The cabin keys.

JUDITH
What the hell.

Judith storms off.

STEFANIE
It's not what you think.

INT. CABIN - MIDNIGHT

It's a simple cabin with a few amenities such as a heater, television, a small desk, and a sofa bed. There is a little counter with a small coffee maker.

James hauls in his guitar case and backpack then sets them next to the door.

STEFANIE
How long have you been playing?

JAMES
A while.

STEFANIE
I played piano. I tried to teach my daughter but.. We kind of lost interest. She used to sing too.

JAMES
She doesn't anymore?

STEFANIE
She got older and things changed.

Stefanie brews some coffee. She cleans a few places with a rag and moves around some cushions for the sofa.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
There isn't much. But, there's a pull out bed in the sofa. Coffee in the nook over there and a full bathroom.

JAMES
Do you ever stop?

STEFANIE
What?

JAMES
Working.

Stefanie realizes it and forces herself to stop but becomes a little restless.

STEFANIE
She leaves this place a mess.

JAMES
Your daughter?

STEFANIE
She uses this from time to time.

James examines the sofa and sees the bed he can pull out for later. He notices a few doodles in dry erase marker on the walls.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
Need any help?

JAMES
I got it.

Stefanie moves the cushions.

James stops her.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I can get this later.

James coughs with few labored breaths that don't quite fill his lungs.

STEFANIE
Everything ok?

JAMES
I'm fine.

STEFANIE
It takes a couple of days to
acclimate to altitude.

JAMES
We'll see.

STEFANIE
See you in the morning.

Stefanie exits.

James looks over the cabin. He stops the coffee pot from it's brew.

JAMES
Why did you let her talk you into
this?

James searches his backpack to find his notebook. He sets it on a table to write.

EXT. CABIN - EARLY MORNING

Judith spies outside the cabin. She quietly places the key into the lock.

The knob turns and the door opens.

A startled Judith steps back from the door to see James.

JUDITH
HOLY SHIT...

JAMES
Don't finish that sentence.

JUDITH
Are you following me?

JAMES
Hey. I'm not. Your mom offered me a
place to sleep. Do you need to come
in for something?

JUDITH
I'll come back later.

INT. CABIN - TABLE - CONTINUOUS

Judith views a notebook on the table. She rushes in and nearly pushes James out of the way.

JUDITH
What the hell! You're here one night and start reading all my shit?

Judith smothers it with her arms.

JAMES
That isn't yours.

JUDITH
Like hell it isn't.

JAMES
Take a look.

Judith examines the book then realizes it isn't hers.

JAMES (CONT'D)
You can put that back.

Judith places the book onto the table and searches her hiding spot. She finds her notebook in place where she left it.

JUDITH
Sorry.

JAMES
I wouldn't have read it.

Judith, embarrassed, rushes out of the cabin.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER - TREATMENT ROOM - MORNING

Judith searches through her notebook but seems distracted. She draws stars onto the edge of the chair.

VANESSA
What's on your mind this morning?

Startled, Judith snaps to attention.

JUDITH
It's nothing.

VANESSA
Is he cute?

JUDITH
What?

VANESSA
Whoever is on your mind.

Judith smiles embarrassed.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
Hey, I was wondering if I'd ever
see one of those.

JUDITH
What do you mean?

VANESSA
I love it when you smile. He must
be cute.

JUDITH
It's just nice to meet someone new.
That thinks I'm normal. I played a
song for him.

VANESSA
He gets a song and I don't?

JUDITH
I posted it online.

VANESSA
I want to see.

Judith turns over her phone to Vanessa and hits play.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
See, you are so talented. You
already have 50 likes and 10
shares. How long ago did you post
it?

JUDITH
Yesterday.

VANESSA
All of this in one day?

JUDITH
I know, right.

VANESSA
I would love to see you on a stage?

JUDITH
Do you really think that could
happen?

Vanessa points to a button that says "Anything is possible".

VANESSA
It's not about what I think. What
do you think?

Judith considers the possibility.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
Beats just surviving.

Judith smiles.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
How's your mom doing?

JUDITH
Don't ask.

VANESSA
Is she reading that book I gave
her?

JUDITH
What book?

VANESSA
I gave her a book on anxiety.

JUDITH
She was reading something.

VANESSA
She cares. Maybe she just needs a
little push to see things clearly.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

James sips at some coffee at the kitchen table.

Stefanie slowly prepares more coffee but appears weepy and
tired.

STEFANIE
I'm sorry about this morning.

JAMES

Has anyone ever told you that you apologize a lot for things that are out of your control. It's not your fault.

STEFANIE

Not exactly.

JAMES

Didn't you say she didn't play piano?

STEFANIE

She doesn't.

JAMES

I found her practicing at the school.

STEFANIE

When was this?

JAMES

After the deer.

STEFANIE

It's been difficult between us lately. We can't really talk.

The coffee machine brews. Stefanie pours a cup for James.

JAMES

Aren't you going to have any?

STEFANIE

I don't really drink it.

JAMES

You don't need to go out of your way for me.

STEFANIE

It's okay. If I don't make it for you, it'll just go to waste.

James gives her a wry smile.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

Well, let me show you around.

EXT. HOUSE - YARD - DAY

Autumn leaves sprinkle the ground from the weather change. The cabin hides down the driveway. A couple of large trees mark the edge of the property. Chunks of a tree stump remain scattered next to the cabin.

STEFANIE

My parents owned this place before it was given to me. This has always been home. Where's home for you?

JAMES

Never really had a steady one.

STEFANIE

Why is that?

James cuts her off.

JAMES

What do you need done?

STEFANIE

I need the yard cleaned. Firewood. It snows pretty bad sometimes in winter.

JAMES

Really? It snows in Vegas like once in a blue moon.

STEFANIE

Vegas?

James has already said too much, he turns away.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

Well, if you stay here long enough, you'll see plenty. It's really pretty.

JAMES

I don't think I'll be here that long.

STEFANIE

What brought you here?

James smirks but doesn't answer.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)

I'll stop with the questions.

JAMES

It's okay.

STEFANIE

Do I seem a little manic with the questions?

JAMES

A little. Is it hard for you to stop sometimes?

STEFANIE

You see that?

James nods then appears lost in his thoughts to work out the details.

JAMES

I've seen it before.

Stefanie walks slowly to the door. She looks back at James as he prepares to get to work then smiles.

EXT. HOUSE - YARD - DAY

James cleans all the fallen branches and debris from the front of the house. He moves slowly and appears pale from the activity.

Eric pulls up in his truck and quickly exits.

Judith hops out with a slam of the door.

ERIC

Hey. Easy on the truck.

Eric sighs and shakes his head when he sees James.

Judith, wilted and worn out, trudges to James.

JUDITH

You don't have to do this.

JAMES

It was the deal I made with her.

ERIC

What is this?

JAMES

I'm just cleaning up the yard.

James continues to pick up the branches.

Eric looks over to Judith.

ERIC
Get some rest. Go back to the house
before you get sick out here.

Judith slumps and walks to the house then looks back through
the window.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Listen. Don't take advantage of
this.

JAMES
I didn't plan to.

ERIC
I mean it.

JAMES
I understand.

Eric races to the door.

He looks back at James, disappointed.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Eric enters without knocking.

The noise spooks Stefanie from her daze.

STEFANIE
You need to stop this. This isn't
your house anymore. You can't just
barge into my life and dictate what
I do.

ERIC
What are you thinking bringing this
guy here?

STEFANIE
He needs help.

ERIC
You need help.

STEFANIE
Do you feel that's your job?

ERIC
Who else is going to do it for you?

STEFANIE

I'm done with this. We don't need you.

ERIC

Is that really what you want?

STEFANIE

Yes.

ERIC

That means no more rides. It means no more texts in the middle of the night. If you don't need me, I need you to say it.

STEFANIE

She is my daughter. We need to have a clean break from you.

Eric pulls back surprised.

Judith listens from the kitchen.

Eric finds her.

ERIC

Please. Just stay away from that guy.

Eric holds back from saying what he wants to say then rushes out the door.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

James relaxes on the sofa. He sips at some water.

Judith sneaks up on James as he's lost in thought.

JUDITH

Hey.

James quickly turns surprised.

JAMES

Hey.

JUDITH

Everything ok?

James coughs.

JAMES
I'm okay. Just thinking.

JUDITH
Do you want to get outta here?

JAMES
I should get back to work.

JUDITH
Please.

EXT. SMALL MOUNTAIN TOWN - DAY

Judith and James walk through the town looking into the windows of various shops.

JAMES
Do you want to get something?

JUDITH
I never really go in.

JAMES
Why?

JUDITH
I just don't.

James notices various people stepping around them.

JAMES
I'm sorry.

JUDITH
For what?

James acknowledges his dirty clothes.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
It's not you. I can wash them for you.

JAMES
Would you?

JUDITH
Of course.

JAMES
It won't take you away from school will it?

Judith giggles.

JUDITH
How young do you think I am?

JAMES
I just assumed.

JUDITH
I went to school there. I graduated last year. No one has really stopped me from playing the piano though. Kind of why I didn't think anyone cared.

Judith pulls out her phone to show James some news.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
You know. I posted it.

JAMES
I know.

JUDITH
Are you getting people to share it?

JAMES
No. If people are sharing, it's because it's really good.

JUDITH
Did you really think it's that good?

JAMES
Absolutely. It reminds me of someone. She was really talented.

JUDITH
Your Ex?

JAMES
Something like that.

JUDITH
Where have you played?

JAMES
Mostly small venues.

James nervously shuffles from sharing too much.

JUDITH
That would be such a dream of mine.

JAMES
You have the talent for it.

JUDITH
Can I play something else for you?

JAMES
Sure.

INT. STAGE - DAY

James pulls a chair next to the piano as Judith readies herself to play.

Judith places her phone onto the Styrofoam.

JUDITH
Can you hit the record button for me?

JAMES
Sure. Tell me when you're ready.

Judith nods.

(Note: This song shows more of Judith's growing vulnerability and hope to connect with James.)

JAMES (CONT'D)
You should play it for her too.

JUDITH
In time.

JAMES
I should be getting back.

JUDITH
Play something for me.

JAMES
I shouldn't.

Judith begs with a look like a sad kitten.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Fine. Scoot.

James slides onto the piano stool next to her.

JUDITH
I thought you only played guitar.

JAMES
I can play a little piano too.

JUDITH
Cool.

JAMES
Why is your mom helping me?

JUDITH
Honestly, I don't know. But, it's pretty common.

JAMES
How so?

JUDITH
It's like... She just has a knack for knowing who needs it? Like it takes one to know one.

JAMES
She does seem a little manic at times.

JUDITH
A little?

James seems a little baffled by her reaction.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
Let's just talk about something else. You were going to play something. Right?

James uses the stress balls to stretch his fingers.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
I do that too.

JAMES
You should if you want to keep your fingers.

(Note: This song shows more of James's history with Ava and connection to her.)

As James sings, Judith harmonizes with him.

When the song finishes, they sit in silence until James breaks the tension.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I really need to get back.

EXT. HOUSE - YARD - AFTERNOON

James struggles through more yard work.

Stefanie sheepishly strides over.

STEFANIE
How's it coming?

JAMES
It's coming along.

STEFANIE
You don't have to do it all today.

JAMES
I really don't know how long I'm
going to be. But, a deal is a deal.
(Beat)
What's going on between you and
Jude?

Judith watches from the window to listen in.

STEFANIE
Like I said, it's just been
difficult between us.

JAMES
Mothers and daughters fight all the
time. Don't they?

STEFANIE
Not like this.

JAMES
Did you and your mother have it any
different?

STEFANIE
We did.

JAMES
Perception has a funny way of
skewing things. If I asked her
about it, what would she say?

STEFANIE
She'd probably turn up the volume
on her headphones.

JAMES

See.

STEFANIE

I'm just trying to help her manage her life.

JAMES

Isn't that for her to figure out?

STEFANIE

Perhaps.

Stefanie contemplates his words.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Judith seethes with anger as she listens to music on the sofa.

Stefanie enters.

Judith erupts into confrontation.

JUDITH

What the hell? Are you gonna give him my whole life story?

STEFANIE

I'm really tired. I don't want to get into this right now.

JUDITH

Mom, this is my life. I don't need everyone knowing and feeling sorry for me. It's hard enough without that.

STEFANIE

I'm trying to protect you.

JUDITH

From who? It makes everyone avoid me like it's a plague. I want to have a normal life for once. Meeting him made me feel normal.

STEFANIE

I can't give you normal.

JUDITH

Clearly.

Judith storms back to her room and slams the door behind her.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

James enters to see Stefanie laid out across the sofa in a daze.

JAMES
Hey. Are you ok?

STEFANIE
I'm fine.

JAMES
What can I do to help?

STEFANIE
I don't know.

James reaches to help her up.

Stefanie blocks his hands from touching her.

James steps back.

Stefanie works up the energy to lift herself.

James stays close should she fall.

JAMES
Which one is your room?

STEFANIE
First one to the right.

James opens the door.

JAMES
Can I get you anything?

STEFANIE
I just need time.

Stefanie falls onto the bed and rolls to her side.

James pulls the blankets up. He returns to the hallway and sees an images on the door jamb. It's a half moon with one side weeping.

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

James knocks on Judith's door.

There is no answer so he knocks harder.

Judith answers expecting a fight. She sees James.

JUDITH
What the fuck!

Judith closes the door but James stops it.

JAMES
No. You aren't going to ignore
this.

JUDITH
This isn't your house. Get out
before I call my dad.

JAMES
You're mom needs help.

James points to the other room.

JUDITH
Oh that? That's pretty normal for
her.

JAMES
She's struggling.

JUDITH
Yeah. I know. She always is. Some
days she's sunshine and rainbows.
Other days she's like she's on the
moon or something. Don't step into
something you don't understand.

JAMES
This isn't hard to understand.
Whatever this is, you need to work
it out.

JUDITH
Why would you care?

JAMES
You can't avoid it. I've seen too
much shit go bad if you do.

JUDITH
There isn't anything I can do.

JAMES
Sure there is.

JUDITH
She doesn't listen to me or my dad.

JAMES
Fine. I don't need this anyway.

JUDITH
What did you just say?

JAMES
I think you heard me just fine. I'm
outta here.

James turns to leave and out the door.

EXT. HOUSE - YARD - AFTERNOON

James carries his guitar and backpack to the Jeep.

Judith stands in front of the car door.

JAMES
Get out of my way.

JUDITH
You're right. She needs help. But,
I don't know how to help her.

Judith weeps, vulnerable. Open and honestly, she lets out her emotions.

JAMES
I don't know how to help her
either.

JUDITH
Maybe she'll listen to you.

JAMES
I'm not here for that.

JUDITH
Please. She's drowning. I don't
know if I can keep pulling her up.

James places down the guitar and backpack then rests his hand on Judith's shoulder.

JAMES
I can't promise anything.

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY - EVENING

Judith walks through the hallway to investigate Stefanie's bedroom.

Stefanie weeps quietly into a pillow. They make brief eye contact. Stefanie smiles before she turns away.

Judith closes the door, wipes off the door jamb with her sleeve, then draws a stick figure with a parachute.

EXT. HOUSE - YARD - THE NEXT DAY

James places all the branches into one big pile. He pulls out the bigger pieces that might make good firewood then tosses them to the side.

Judith places on work gloves and races over.

JAMES
How's your mom?

JUDITH
She's ok for now. Sleeping till
forever at the moment.

JAMES
Where's your dad in all this?

JUDITH
Eric is not my real dad. I wish he
was.

JAMES
Why would that matter?

JUDITH
I don't know my paternal dad.

JAMES
What's that got to do with you and
your mom?

JUDITH
Because.. We've needed to search
for a blood relative.

Judith jumps in to separate the wood.

James stops her.

JAMES
I got this.

JUDITH
I'm sick. NOT FRAGILE.

JAMES
I just want you to throw the little
pieces over there. I don't think
you're fragile.

James points at the smaller branches while he pulls out
larger ones for firewood.

Judith acknowledges.

JAMES (CONT'D)
What do you mean you're sick?

JUDITH
She didn't tell you?

JAMES
Tell me what?

JUDITH
I thought for sure she did.

JAMES
She just said you two were having
issues. I don't know. Mother
daughter problems.

JUDITH
There is a little more to it than
that.

JAMES
How so?

JUDITH
Can you promise me something?

James stops to give her his full attention.

JAMES
What?

JUDITH
If I tell you, you can't look at me
different.

JAMES
Why would I do that?

JUDITH
Because you will.

JAMES

I'm not going to treat you like a sick girl if that is what you're thinking.

Judith draws up the courage to show James her left wrist. Her arm close to the wrist has a medical device that is widening the vein. This is a typical device for hemodialysis.

JAMES (CONT'D)

What am I looking at?

JUDITH

It's for my dialysis.

JAMES

Is there something wrong with your kidneys?

JUDITH

Ya think?

JAMES

Hey. I've heard people live a long time on dialysis. It's not that big of a deal anymore.

JUDITH

It is for me.

JAMES

Why?

JUDITH

Cause I have stage five CKD.

JAMES

How many stages are there?

JUDITH

Five.

It's a lightbulb moment as his expression changes. He realizes her situation is more dire than expected.

JAMES

Are you saying you're dying?

JUDITH

Maybe??? If I can get a transplant, I'll be able to live longer. But out here, who knows.

JAMES
You're mom can't be a donor?

JUDITH
She got a transplant from my
grampa.

JAMES
Which is why she worries about
getting sick.

JUDITH
Yeah. COVID was really tough on us.

JAMES
COVID was tough on everyone.

James stops working. He coughs and steps away from Judith.

JUDITH
Are you ok?

JAMES
Stay away. I said I wouldn't look
at you different. But, I can't be
here right now.

JUDITH
You promised.

JAMES
I know.

James rushes away to the cabin.

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

James enters then searches for a cup to pour some water into.
James hyperventilates. He drinks the water to calm his
breathing.

JAMES
You shouldn't stay here.

CUT TO:

INT. LAS VEGAS STAGE PIT - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

James and Ava sit in silence.

JAMES

Let's leave this place. We don't need to be here.

AVA

Where are we going to go? We don't have any money. We can't even busk for change. I can't live like this.

JAMES

We can find a way.

AVA

I'm scared.

JAMES

We can make it work.

BACK TO:

INT. HOUSE - STEFANIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stefanie lays in bed silent but awake.

Judith enters and lays on the bed next to Stefanie. Judith cuddles her arms around Stefanie and holds her tight.

JUDITH

I'm so sorry.

STEFANIE

It's ok.

Judith cries and searches for comfort.

Stefanie doesn't push away the embrace.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

James stares into the ceiling as he tosses and turns to get comfortable.

JAMES

How did I end up here?

James sits up to scribble into the notebook.

INT. CABIN - EARLY MORNING

Judith looks around the cabin. She watches James sleep but have difficulty breathing. Judith reads from his notebook open on the table.

JAMES (V.O.)

Is it natural to be afraid of taking my life? Driving to some no name town. Travelling aimlessly into someone else's disaster? Why did I agree to this? I should have just jumped into that river. I should have just crashed the car on the road. But, I've chosen a slow painful burn.

James turns in the bed.

Judith turns pages to not make a sound.

JUDITH

What's wrong?

Judith gently rubs his cheek. She wipes away a tear then nudges on his shoulder.

James wakes to see Judith next to the bed.

JAMES

Why are you here?

JUDITH

I need your help.

JAMES

I can't help you.

JUDITH

I just need a ride into town. I have a dialysis this morning.

JAMES

What about your dad?

JUDITH

He isn't coming.

JAMES

You know, I'm leaving.

JUDITH

I just need a ride to the doctor's office.

JAMES
Where's your mom?

JUDITH
She's on the moon today. I usually
call my dad when that happens.

JAMES
Why me?

JUDITH
Because, you're still here.

James realizes that she isn't going to accept "No" just like
her mother would do.

JAMES
This is the part when you go
outside and wait for me.

Judith sees the guitar case by the door.

JUDITH
Hey. This is yours?

James hops out of bed and to the bathroom.

JAMES (O.S.)
Be careful with it.

Judith finds the guitar case and opens the it to admire the
guitar.

JUDITH
Cool stickers.

She traces the "Ava & J" sticker with a touch of her fingers.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
I'm still struggling to learn. It's
hard to play with my wrist.

JAMES
You play piano just fine.

James packs all of his belongings into the backpack. He sees
the notebook open on the table.

JUDITH
That's different. I don't need my
wrist as much.

James closes the book then places it into the backpack.

JAMES
Close that up.

JUDITH
You're really leaving?

JAMES
Yeah. I can give you a ride but
it's now or never.

James rubs his temples to relieve the pressure of a head
ache. He finds an aspirin bottle and pops a couple to ease
the pain.

JUDITH
You know those aren't breath mints.

INT./EXT. JEEP - TRAVELLING - MORNING

James drives in silence.

Judith waits for an opportunity to speak.

JAMES
What are you staring at?

JUDITH
Please, don't leave.

JAMES
I shouldn't be here.

JUDITH
You said you'd help.

JAMES
I know what I said. But, I am not
your guy for this.

JUDITH
Just talk to her. She won't listen
to me.

JAMES
Have you really tried without
making it a fight?

JUDITH
Please, just one time. She's all I
have and I know I can't do it.

JAMES
What about your dad?

JUDITH
She finally drove him away.

JAMES
He was just there the other day.

JUDITH
She cut him out of everything.

JAMES
I think you're relationship with
him has nothing to do with her.

JUDITH
Just help me one time. If she
doesn't listen, you can go.

JAMES
You're just like her.

JUDITH
How?

JAMES
She doesn't accept a "No" either.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER - WAITING ROOM - MORNING

James reviews pamphlets and other reading material as he waits on a sofa. He touches the sofa as it triggers another memory.

CUT TO:

INT. THERAPY OFFICE - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

A simple gray sofa, calming decor, soft lighting, and mood music feel overdone.

James, bored out of his mind, stares blankly at a counselor.

COUNSELOR
Are we finally going to talk about
this?

James doesn't acknowledge the question.

COUNSELOR (CONT'D)
We can't continue to go in circles.

JAMES
What do you expect me to do?

COUNSELOR
Open up. Let someone in for once.

BACK TO:

INT. MEDICAL CENTER - TREATMENT ROOM - MORNING

Judith quietly watches television as the dialysis machine runs. She searches through channels for something to watch.

Vanessa attends to Judith's wrist.

VANESSA
Is that the guy?

JUDITH
That's James. He's staying in the
cabin.

VANESSA
Oh yeah?

Judith smiles but doesn't say anything.

There is a tap on the door before James enters.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
I'll leave you two.

Vanessa winks at Judith before she leaves.

JAMES
Hey, how long does this thing take?

JUDITH
About four hours.

JAMES
You could have warned me.

JUDITH
I'm sorry.

JAMES
Mind if I sit?

JUDITH
Sure.

James finds an empty chair to plop into. He notices the stars drawn across the edges of the Judith's chair.

JAMES

So, what does this machine do?

JUDITH

It filters my blood. I don't know how it works but.. I feel a lot better when it's done.

JAMES

How often do you have to come here?

JUDITH

Three times a week.

JAMES

That's like every other day.

JUDITH

Pretty much.

James carries a pamphlet and gives it to Judith.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

What is this?

JAMES

What do you know about Bipolar disorder?

JUDITH

Nothing really.

JAMES

Your mom is tired a lot then she gets like this mania right?

JUDITH

Yeah, I would call it something like that.

JAMES

I was reading this pamphlet in the waiting room. It sounds a lot like what your mom is going through.

JUDITH

Are you serious?

JAMES

Yeah, take a look.

Judith looks over the pamphlet and recognizes many of the symptoms.

JUDITH
This is totally her.

JAMES
The pamphlet is about this medication you can take for it. But, I don't know your mom well enough.

JUDITH
This is exactly right.

JAMES
You should show her this.

JUDITH
We need to talk to her.

JAMES
No way.

JUDITH
You promised.

JAMES
It isn't my place. Mental health isn't an easy thing to bring up. People think it's about being crazy. They just have challenges.

JUDITH
This is why I'm asking for your help. I can't say it like you just did.

JAMES
But, you're family. It doesn't have to be perfect.

JUDITH
I can't do it alone.

JAMES
What about your dad?

JUDITH
He'll just make her tune it out.

JAMES
I am not the guy for this.

JUDITH
Like it or not you are. Why would you bring me this?

James stands and opens the door to leave.

JAMES
I don't know.

JUDITH
Don't run from this.

James looks back but says nothing.

EXT. MEDICAL CENTER - MORNING

James rushes out in search of his Jeep. He looks back to the building.

VANESSA (O.S.)
She still has an hour or so.

Vanessa, at the edge of the building, hides a cigarette.

James finds her voice.

JAMES
Can you call her dad to pick her up?

VANESSA
Why?

JAMES
Please?

VANESSA
She likes you. You know.

James frowns and turns away.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
Give me a good reason.

JAMES
I can't.

VANESSA
She's got over a thousand likes now.

JAMES
Good for her.

VANESSA

You should see some of the comments too. I think one guy wants to produce her music.

JAMES

She should be careful of people online.

VANESSA

That's why she needs you.

JAMES

She doesn't need me.

VANESSA

She's been through a lot.

JAMES

We all have.

VANESSA

Perhaps, but that girl fights like no one I've ever seen.

Vanessa extinguishes her cigarette and walks over to James.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

Walk with me?

JAMES

I need to go.

VANESSA

What's a couple of minutes?

They walk a few steps around the building.

JAMES

What's with all the buttons?

VANESSA

Just random quotes. Little messages of positivity.

JAMES

Don't you think it can be dangerous to hope?

VANESSA

You're already giving her hope with the music. There's nothing wrong with that.

JAMES
I can't give her hope.

VANESSA
Who said she needs that from you?

JAMES
I just thought.

VANESSA
What she needs is a partner to support her.

They continue around the building.

JAMES
What are you trying to tell me then?

VANESSA
That girl has never asked for anything.

JAMES
I can't help her.

VANESSA
Is she the one that really needs it?

CUT TO:

INT. LAS VEGAS APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Totals of recent COVID infections and deaths highlight the TV news.

Ava and James watch on opposite ends of a sofa.

JAMES
It's going to get better.

AVA
What if it doesn't?

Ava, stressed, scratches at her wrist.

James doesn't notice her anxiety.

JAMES
It will.

He leaves.

AVA
Stay with me.

James, already on his way to the bedroom, doesn't hear her.

INT. LAS VEGAS APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ava lingers over him. She kisses him on the cheek

AVA
I'm sorry.

James, sound asleep, feels it and smiles.

BACK TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN WOODS - BEHIND THE COFFEE SHOP - MORNING

James, by the river's edge, skips rocks across the water. He coughs more uncontrollably than before.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER - NURSES STATION - DAY

Vanessa hesitates a moment to make a phone call then dials anyway.

It rings.

INTERCUT

CUT TO:

INT. CONSTRUCTION WORKSITE - CONTINUOUS

Eric answers the phone after checking the number.

ERIC
Is there something wrong?

VANESSA
Nothing's wrong.

ERIC
She got there?

VANESSA
With time to spare. You may need to come get her though.

ERIC
Stefanie's not there?

VANESSA
It was James. But I guess he's
leaving.

ERIC
I'll get there as soon as I can.

VANESSA
Hold that thought.

Vanessa notices Judith lugging James's guitar. She covers the
phone.

VANESSA (CONT'D)
Where'd you get that?

JUDITH
It's his. Is it ok?

Judith points up to the roof.

VANESSA
It's fine.

Judith heads to the stairs.

ERIC
How much time does she need?

VANESSA
Actually, she's going to be fine.

ERIC
I should be there.

VANESSA
Let this one play out. She needs
this.

ERIC
Are you sure?

VANESSA
You've always been there. Let her
work it out.

ERIC
I guess.

VANESSA
She's got this.

BACK TO:

EXT. JEEP WRANGLER - DAY

James presses the keys into the Jeep's ignition. He contemplates then searches the Jeep for his guitar and backpack.

The guitar is missing.

EXT. MEDICAL CENTER - ROOF - DAY

Judith relaxes in the director's chair with James's guitar. She draws a broken heart with stitches to hold it together.

Judith strums the guitar when she's done.

James opens the door to the roof then walks over to the ledge careful to not look down.

JAMES
Vanessa told me I'd find you up
here.

Judith focuses on her notebook while she continues to work out the music.

JAMES (CONT'D)
What do you write in yours?

JUDITH
Stuff.

James recognizes that she even has some talent with the guitar.

JAMES
I thought you said you were still
learning.

JUDITH
What do you think?

JAMES
If you hold it a little
differently, you can make it easier
on your wrist.

James holds out his hands to take the guitar but she keeps it.

JUDITH
I can figure it out.

James, careful to not provoke and make her more angry, finds a comfortable place to sit.

JAMES
I shouldn't be involved.

JUDITH
Why not? You're already involved.
You could have left but you're
still here.

JAMES
I'm the last person you want
helping.

JUDITH
Why?

JAMES
I came here running from my own
shit.

James coughs harder but finds his breathe again. He looks toward the mountains.

JAMES (CONT'D)
It's nice up here.

JUDITH
It's my spot.

JAMES
How so?

JUDITH
I've been here so many times they
let me come up here to get away for
a while.

JAMES
The mountain sure does make you
feel small.

JUDITH
I like to think I'm bigger than the
mountain.

James questions her with a look to explain.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

Well, the mountain's boring. It's always going to be there. It's almost like it doesn't have a purpose. I have control over what I do. I can affect what happens to me.

JAMES

Are you sure? The machine down stairs says otherwise. Besides, the mountain may have purpose. It's not always going to be a mountain. One day, it could be the bottom of the ocean. It just changes slower than us.

JUDITH

What are you trying to say?

JAMES

For someone that says they can control what happens to them, it seems like a lot happens TO you.

JUDITH

That's not what I mean.

JAMES

Then what do you mean?

JUDITH

I mean I can control how I choose to deal with it.

JAMES

Yeah maybe. We still can't change anything.

JUDITH

Why are you being like this?

JAMES

You're asking me to involve myself into your mom's mess. Your mess.

JUDITH

And you're just trying to avoid it even though you act like you want to do something.

Judith places the guitar back into its case. She packs up a few things to leave.

JAMES

Hey, look. I'm sorry.

JUDITH

Why won't you help me?

JAMES

Life seems to be a lot more random. We all make choices. Sure. We can all choose how we deal with it. But, it's ours. You can't just dive into someone's shit and expect them to be happy about it. Trust me. I've been through the therapy shit.

JUDITH

Why did you come here?

JAMES

What do you want me to say? I have my reasons. I've made a lot of mistakes in my life. They didn't lead in any kind of direction. My choices just changed slowly till one day I ended up in this mess.

JUDITH

I think that's really pessimistic. I don't want to think that it's all random. You ended up here, of all places, with US. There has to be a reason. Or what's the point?

JAMES

What if, there is no point or purpose? What if, it is as pointless as that mountain. You're pushed into existence. You didn't choose to be here. You just... ended up here.

JUDITH

I'm not going to buy into any of your suicidal bullshit.

JAMES

Excuse me?

JUDITH

I know you're hypoxic.

JAMES

You don't know shit.

JUDITH

Don't treat me like I'm dumb. I see the symptoms. The headache. The coughing. You're dehydrated.

James grows uncomfortable.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

I read your little notebook too. It's kind of chicken shit. I'm dying for real. And you're here trying to die.

James's anger boils to the surface.

JAMES

You don't know what it's like. What I have to live with.

JUDITH

What do you think I have to live with?

JAMES

You have people that care about you.

JUDITH

I am in pain every day.

JAMES

We know. She knows you hurt. She's been there.

JUDITH

Try it on and see how you like it.

JAMES

I have my own.

JUDITH

At least you can do something about it. I have to wait for something terrible to happen.

James stands onto the ledge.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

I've got news for you. I've more reason to jump off this building than you.

JAMES

You don't know my life. You don't know what it's like to lose someone you care about because you didn't do enough.

JUDITH

And you don't know years of hospital rooms and kidney stones. You don't know about dealing with a crazy mom or knowing that your father isn't your real dad. You don't know what it's like to hope for someone to die. You don't know what it's like to be stuck in a small town watching everyone around you know that you're sick.

JAMES

You're not the first person to have those issues.

JUDITH

And you are not the first person to experience loneliness either.

JAMES

How far is it to the street?

JUDITH

I'm not looking.

JAMES

How far!

JUDITH

I'm not going to watch this.

JAMES

What if I was your match and that was my purpose? What if you could have a new kidney today? All I would need to do is jump.

JUDITH

I'm not going to watch you do this.

JAMES

Would you stop me?

JUDITH

Don't.

JAMES

This is for you. This is what
you're hoping for. If someone has
to die to let you live, why can't
it be me?

James holds his arms out and looks into the sky. He leans
back ready to fall.

Judith wraps her arms around him to pull him back.

James grabs onto a pole to stop their fall. He has to use all
his strength to pull them back to safety. James can feel
Judith tremble in his arms.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

The emotion runs through her and she cries like never before
on his shoulder.

JUDITH

I'm scared.

JAMES

I know. I am too.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The lights flicker on and James finds a mess of broken dishes
on the floor. He's careful with his footsteps walking through
the debris.

JUDITH

And the day just gets better.

JAMES

She did this?

JUDITH

Ya think? But, new dishes. Yay.

Judith sarcastically mimics a cheerleader.

JAMES

Do you really think this is the
best time to talk to her?

JUDITH

I don't want to lose her.

James breathes in but can barely hold it. He appears pale and
there is a blue tinge in his lips.

JAMES
Okay. It's now or never.

JUDITH
I thought you didn't want to get involved.

JAMES
I don't. I didn't.

JUDITH
Why now?

JAMES
You're right. Out of the millions of places I could of ended up, why here? Why now?

Judith picks up the shards of broken dishes.

James searches for a broom to clean up the mess.

CUT TO:

INT. LAS VEGAS APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING (FLASHBACK)

Loud knocks on the front door wakes James from his sleep. He looks over to see the other side of the bed empty.

JAMES
Ava?

More loud knocks.

James finds some pants to put on.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I'm coming.

More knocks.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Ava?

INT. LAS VEGAS APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

James rushes through the apartment but sees no signs of Ava. He answers the door.

At the door are two LVPD Officers. The lead, Officer Daniels, glares at James.

They look as if they've had a long night because their eyes have bags and their COVID masks are stretched thin.

OFFICER DANIELS
Does Ava Richards live here?

JAMES
She does. What can I do for you officer?

OFFICER DANIELS
We are here for some information.

JAMES
She's not here at the moment.

OFFICER DANIELS
Yeah, I know. May I come in?

JAMES
Why?

OFFICER DANIELS
I'd rather not do this on your porch.

James shows them in.

The officers enter and stand in strategic places of the room.

JAMES
What's this about?

OFFICER DANIELS
What's your relationship to her?

JAMES
She's my fiancée.

OFFICER DANIELS
Would you have her family contact information?

JAMES
I do. What's going on?

OFFICER DANIELS
Can you take a seat?

JAMES
I prefer to stand.

James recognizes a note on the counter with his name on it.

Officer Daniels pauses a moment because he's about to deliver the worst news. He hates this part but pushes through the expression to explain.

OFFICER DANIELS
Last night we found.....

James already knows what's coming before Officer Daniels can even finish his sentence. His ears ring and fade to silence as he screams out in agony.

BACK TO:

INT. HOUSE - STEFANIE'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Stefanie lays in silence on the bed. She clutches a picture of Judith.

James slowly enters the room.

JAMES
Hey. Are you awake?

Stefanie doesn't respond and James slowly closes the door before she snaps together.

STEFANIE
It's okay. I'm awake.

JAMES
Can we talk?

STEFANIE
Sure.

Stefanie slowly rises from the bed.

JAMES
Would you mind coming into the other room?

STEFANIE
Okay.

JAMES
Jude and I just thought you might be hungry.

Stefanie, visibly depressed, composes herself.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Stefanie, draped in a robe, sits at the table and watches Judith make lunch.

JUDITH
Good afternoon.

STEFANIE
Good morning.

JUDITH
No, afternoon.

Stefanie realizes she's been asleep most of the afternoon.

STEFANIE
Did you go to dialysis?

JUDITH
Yeah, James took me.

JAMES
It's all good. You don't have to worry.

Stefanie looks around the table to see toast, cereal, and some cut fruit.

STEFANIE
I'm sorry.

JUDITH
It's okay mom.

Judith serves some eggs onto a plate and brings them over.

Stefanie wipes the tears from her face. She takes deliberate breaths to relieve her anxiety.

STEFANIE
I'll be fine.

JAMES
This is what we want to talk about.

STEFANIE
Why?

JAMES
Jude is concerned about your mood swings.

Stefanie blushes embarrassed about the broken dishes.

STEFANIE

I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me.

JAMES

That's the problem.

JUDITH

Mom. You need help and don't see it.

STEFANIE

So, I can't worry about you?

JAMES

Do you think that breaking dishes is about Jude? Or something else?

STEFANIE

You don't know the stress I'm under.

JUDITH

What do you think I'm going through?

Judith feels a sharp pain in her side but plays it off.

JAMES

I can understand your stress.

STEFANIE

No. You can't.

JAMES

Take a look at this objectively. You have bouts of high energy. Swings of almost lethargic sleep. Jude draws on the door jamb based on your mood. Broken dishes? What else would you call this?

Stefanie closes her eyes as the stress builds up.

STEFANIE

So, you're saying I'm crazy.

JAMES

No. Mental health is not about crazy. It's about recognizing that your mind is different than others.

JUDITH

How do we get better?

JAMES

By acknowledging something's wrong.

Stefanie stands as the mania grows and paces across the kitchen.

STEFANIE

If you're such an expert, tell me why you stranded yourself here.

JAMES

This isn't about me.

STEFANIE

It isn't?

JUDITH

Mom. Let's focus on you.

STEFANIE

No. You two don't get to decide that I'm the one the needs help.

Stefanie races outside in a mess of tears.

EXT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Stefanie throws chunks of wood against the cabin. Chipping away at the exterior.

Judith and James come racing after her.

JUDITH

MOM STOP!

JAMES

Do you think this is healthy?

STEFANIE

You know nothing about me. You've been here what.. A couple of days and think you're some therapist.

Stefanie continues to throw wood shards that snap and splinter.

James snaps back at her.

JAMES

I've seen what ignoring this can do.

STEFANIE
What? What happens?

JUDITH
Nothing good.

STEFANIE
Why would you bring him into this?

JUDITH
Because you don't listen to me or Dad.

STEFANIE
So, I have mood swings. And you come to this town like some scared kid talking to me like you know better.

JAMES
You're right. I'm not an expert.

STEFANIE
You can leave. I'm not going to have you talk to me like I'm the one that needs help when you clearly need it yourself.

JUDITH
Mom. He didn't have to do this. I asked him to.

STEFANIE
Why?

James boils over with emotion but holds it like a volcano ready to pop.

JAMES
I lost someone close to me. The lockdown, the stress... it was too much for her.

JUDITH
Who did you lose?

JAMES
My fiancée took her own life.

Stefanie realizes the power of his words and stops silent.

JAMES (CONT'D)
She struggled with it. Through the stress and anxiety.
(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

The lock down put an enormous amount of pressure on her. Neither of us were working.

STEFANIE

I'm sorry.

Stefanie shakes with anxiety.

JAMES

Yes. I struggle. I wanted to take my own life. That's why I'm here. It's hard for me to live with the fact that I didn't do enough. Now, Jude is trying to do what I couldn't. And you're too proud to admit there's a problem.

Judith embraces James and can feel him shiver with vulnerability.

JUDITH

You're shaking.

Judith removes the hoodie, her armor, and offers it to James. She stands vulnerable hopeful he'll accept.

James slides on the hoodie and Judith hugs him. She grips the tear on the lower back of it.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

I didn't know.

JAMES

How could you?

Stefanie watches James and Judith embrace as he weeps into her shoulder. She recognizes her hands shaking, her nervous pace, the shards of wood cutting her hands, and her distance. Stefanie slowly reaches for them.

Judith grabs her hand.

STEFANIE

How do I start?

JAMES

Small. But asking for help is a first step.

STEFANIE

Okay. I need help.

Judith releases from James and envelopes Stefanie in her embrace.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

James strums his guitar for Judith. He sings a familiar song and she duets with him.

Stefanie watches from the kitchen as she realizes their talent.

JUDITH
Thank you.

JAMES
It's up to her now.

Judith feels a pain in her side. She stands and walks to the bathroom.

James recognizes the agony in her demeanor.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Are you ok?

JUDITH
I'm fine.

INT. HOUSE - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Judith looks into the mirror. She's scared and splashes some water on her face then pats her face with a towel.

JUDITH
It'll pass. The others did. This one will too.

Judith flushes the toilet with a hint of blood in the water.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Judith walks by as if nothing is wrong.

JUDITH
I have to go. My dad is coming to pick me up.

JAMES
When?

JUDITH
Right now. He's taking me to a
movie. Wanna come?

JAMES
I probably shouldn't

JUDITH
More popcorn for me.

JAMES
I saw you wince. You can't hide it.

JUDITH
Watch me.

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

James returns to see the girls embraced.
Stefanie cries onto Judith's shoulder.

JUDITH
It's okay mom. It's okay.

As Judith sees James, she puts her finger to her lips to keep
him quiet.

INT. CABIN - EVENING

James packs his things.
There is a knock on the door.
James opens the door to find Judith waiting.

JAMES
I thought your dad was coming.

JUDITH
He is. I just have something else I
wanted you to hear.

JAMES
Why won't you tell your mom?

JUDITH
It's just a kidney stone. It'll
pass.

JAMES

Just a kidney stone? You say it like it's normal. Most people have to go to the hospital when that happens.

Judith shrugs it off. She hands him her phone and ear buds then hits play.

It's another amazing original.

Judith steps in close enough to kiss him.

James removes the ear buds and gently stops her.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I can't.

The honk of Eric's truck pierces the tension.

Judith slumps, disappointed, then leaves.

James packs all of his things into the backpack.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I can't let her see me die.

James coughs extremely violent. He collapses to the floor, turns pale, and his lips tinge blue. James passes out.

INT. MOUNTAIN COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

Eric and Judith relax in a booth after eating to talk things over. She draws a jumping stick figure man onto the window.

OLLIE

Hey. I haven't seen you in a while. Your mom let you out of the dungeon?

JUDITH

Hey Ollie.

OLLIE

Dinner's on me today.

JUDITH

Isn't it always on you.

OLLIE

I take that back then.

Ollie smiles and winks at Judith. He turns to Eric and sneers at him before leaving.

JUDITH
Mom agreed to get some help.

ERIC
She did?

JUDITH
I know. Shocked the hell out of me too.

ERIC
What are you hoping I can do in all this? You heard her. She doesn't want me around. I was surprised she even called tonight.

JUDITH
Just give her the space and time to get better. She'll come back around.

ERIC
I still don't trust him.

JUDITH
Why don't you like him?

ERIC
It's not him. It's me. It just feels like your mom let him in to get back at me. And now he gets to do the thing I wanted to do.

JUDITH
And what was that?

ERIC
Have her listen.

JUDITH
Well, she did finally.

ERIC
I hope so. Let me take you back home.

EXT. HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Eric pulls into the driveway.

ERIC
Call if you need anything.

JUDITH
I will.

Judith exits the truck and slams the door behind.

ERIC
Easy on the truck.

Eric backs and pulls away from the driveway.

Judith feels faint. She rushes to the cabin door then knocks as hard as she can. Judith falls to the ground. Her head smacks the concrete.

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

The hard knock wakes James.

James stands and rubs his temples because of a headache.

Out the front window, James finds Judith passed out on the steps. He quickly opens the door.

EXT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

The situation is dire. Judith lays unconscious and a pool of blood forms under her.

James yells but can't find enough air in his lungs to do so. He picks Judith up and races to the Jeep.

EXT. HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Stefanie sees James frantic around the Jeep. She runs out to the driveway.

STEFANIE
What happened?

JAMES
I don't know. I just found her on the steps.

STEFANIE
Where's the blood coming from?

JAMES
I don't know. A kidney stone I
think.

STEFANIE
We need to get her to the hospital.

James reaches for his keys but can barely maintain himself.
They get Judith into the front seat.

Stefanie hops in the back.

JAMES
Where do we go?

STEFANIE
To the clinic.

JAMES
Are you sure we can get there?

James starts the Jeep and steps on the gas.

INT./EXT. JEEP WRANGLER - TRAVELLING - NIGHT

James speeds through traffic.

He looks down to the dashboard to notice he's on empty.

JAMES
Come on. We have to make it.

James coughs and almost loses control of the Jeep.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Please, not now.

STEFANIE
Be careful. Are you ok?

JAMES
I can make it.

The altitude sickness alters his vision and the road looks
smaller.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Please.

EXT. MEDICAL CENTER - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

James barely holds onto consciousness. He coughs nonstop and can't breathe. James puts the Jeep into neutral as it crashes to a stop into a parked car.

Stefanie, nearly pushed into the front seat, appears to be fine.

An officer witnesses the accident and rushes over.

James steps out of the car bruised but still moving.

JAMES
They need help.

James passes out.

OFFICER
What's wrong?

The officer attends to James on the floor.

STEFANIE
I don't know.. But, my daughter is
in trouble. She needs help.

Vanessa rushes out to help.

VANESSA
What's going on?

STEFANIE
Another stone.

A couple of nurses arrive on scene with a gurney.

VANESSA
She's losing a lot of blood.

The nurses load Judith onto a gurney and rush her inside.

STEFANIE
What's wrong with him?

Vanessa examines James. She sees all the signs of hypoxia.

VANESSA
I need oxygen stat.

STEFANIE
What?

VANESSA
Did you know he's hypoxic?

STEFANIE
Oh my god. No. No.....I didn't.

Stefanie, about to lose it, holds on to the moment.

STEFANIE (CONT'D)
What can I do?

Another gurney is rushed out to the accident. She helps load James onto it and into the hospital.

INT. HOSPITAL - JUDITH'S ROOM - DAY

Judith sleeps quietly as the dialysis machine hums next to her. A unit of blood flows down a tube into one arm as the other gets filtered by the machine.

Stefanie rests in a chair next to the bed.

A nurse enters.

NURSE
He's waking up.

STEFANIE
Thank you so much.

She rushes to the other room.

INT. HOSPITAL - JAMES'S ROOM - MORNING

It's a common hospital room with two beds and a TV bolted to the wall close to the ceiling. The sun shines through the window.

James wakes to find himself attached to an oxygen machine and an IV in his arm.

He removes the oxygen tubes attached to his nose.

Stefanie reaches for his hand to stop him and places it back.

STEFANIE
No, don't. They said you'd been suffering from altitude sickness.

JAMES
I know.

STEFANIE
You knew this was happening?

JAMES
Yes.

STEFANIE
How come you didn't tell us?

JAMES
I didn't come here to live. You know that.

STEFANIE
But you're still trying to..

JAMES
This is the whole reason I drove into the mountains.

STEFANIE
You need help. Just like us. We don't want you to do this.

JAMES
I feel responsible for not getting my fiancée help.

STEFANIE
You chose to help me. It seems like you're trying to make up for it.

JAMES
It doesn't bring her back.

STEFANIE
Sure, sometimes it's going to be hard. But, I'd give anything for Jude.

JAMES
What if I could give it to you?

STEFANIE
You could be a living donor. But, I don't think they'd let you.

JAMES
What if it's my fate.

STEFANIE
And what if, you were supposed to live.

JAMES

I don't know if I can.

STEFANIE

What was it you said last night?
The first step is asking for help.

Stefanie looks straight into his eyes and James can't find an answer.

INT. HOSPITAL - JUDITH'S ROOM - DAY

Eric waits next to the window. He watches the traffic below sipping a cup of coffee.

Stefanie walks over to him then places her hand on his shoulder.

Eric looks at her surprised then down at her hand.

ERIC

He woke up?

STEFANIE

He did.

ERIC

That's his Jeep they're cleaning up? What happened?

STEFANIE

I don't know. We think it was another stone.

ERIC

She didn't say a thing last night.

STEFANIE

I couldn't tell either.

ERIC

Why doesn't she tell us?

STEFANIE

It's my fault.

ERIC

What's wrong with him? Why did he crash getting her here?

STEFANIE

He's hypoxic.

Another surprised look falls onto Eric's face.

The doctor enters to talk with Eric and Stefanie.

DOCTOR
How are you today?

STEFANIE
As good as could be expected.

ERIC
What's happening to her?

DOCTOR
She's going into renal failure. She needs a transplant now. We put her on a high priority list. All we can do now is wait and hope. I'm sorry. I wish there was more I could do.

The Doctor exits.

Eric turns disappointed and leaves the room.

INT. HOSPITAL - JAMES'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Eric enters his room.

James can see the fear and anxiety in his eyes.

ERIC
Can we talk?

JAMES
Is she ok?

ERIC
She's going into renal failure.

JAMES
Why are you telling me this?

ERIC
Why come to Colorado if you know you're hypoxic?

JAMES
I think you already know the answer.

ERIC
I do. But why would you stay with them? Or even try to help?

JAMES

They wouldn't let me say no.

ERIC

That's a child's answer. You could have said no if you wanted.

Eric thinks a moment then turns to leave.

ERIC (CONT'D)

I don't think you really want to do it or you wouldn't have risked everything to bring her here.

James can't find a response.

INT. HOSPITAL - JAMES'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

James stares out the window as the sun sets. The afternoon light is a glow of orange and amber.

The Doctor pulls the privacy curtain then places themself close to the bed.

DOCTOR

The nurse said you called for me?

JAMES

Thanks for coming. I want you to test me to see if I'm a match.

DOCTOR

There is a lot of risk involved.

JAMES

I don't care about the risk.

DOCTOR

It's recommended that you be in prime health to even be considered.

JAMES

Please, just test me. I need to know if I can help her. I'll take the risk.

DOCTOR

That's asking a lot.

There is awkward silence as James ponders his words.

JAMES

But, we could both live too.

The doctor pulls back the curtains and walks over to the nurse waiting for them in the doorway.

The Doctor whispers into the nurse's ear.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I need to do this.

INT. HOSPITAL - JAMES'S ROOM - EVENING

Vanessa comes in to serve James dinner. She raises the bed.

VANESSA
Are you ready for dinner?

JAMES
Do you know if my tests have come back yet?

VANESSA
You gave us a heck of a scare last night and you're worried about that.

JAMES
Have they?

VANESSA
No, they haven't.

Vanessa sets up a dinner tray and pushes it close to James.

JAMES
Can you do me a favor?

VANESSA
What do you need?

JAMES
I want to see her.

VANESSA
You're not supposed to be out of bed.

JAMES
Please? I may not get another chance.

VANESSA
I'll see what I can do.

INT. HOSPITAL - JUDITH'S ROOM - NIGHT

The lights are off except for the night light next to Judith's bed. She writes a few thoughts down on a piece of paper.

Stefanie sleeps on the other bed of the room.

Vanessa wheels James in on a wheelchair.

JAMES

Thank you.

She places him close to Judith then winks at her before leaving.

JUDITH

Hey, how are you?

JAMES

I'm doing okay. How about you?

JUDITH

I'm just writing a few things down.

JAMES

What are you writing?

JUDITH

Lyrics.

JAMES

Another song? Tell me why you haven't told her.

JUDITH

It's my secret. I've been teaching myself to play for years. You can find a lot on YouTube. I've learned guitar, piano. I wanted something that was completely mine. Even when everything else wasn't. I was building memories for her. Like a little treasure trove of things she could find if I ever.....you know.

JAMES

You shared it with me.

JUDITH

Because, you shared something personal with me. Do you want to hear this one?

JAMES
I'd love to.

JUDITH
This song... it's everything I've
been wanting to tell you.

Judith grabs her scrap of paper to sing the lyrics.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
Forgive me. I don't have a piano to
play it on.

JAMES
It's okay. I'll imagine it.

Judith moves her fingers into place as if playing a piano
then sings quietly to not wake Stefanie.

*(Note: This original song encapsulates hope, meaning, and
depth of Judith's character reaching out to James to find
his.)*

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LAS VEGAS STAGE PIT - NIGHT

The hospital room changes to the Las Vegas stage pit James
knows well. He envisions Judith playing the piano and singing
this song.

As the song finishes, the scene fades back into the hospital
room.

FADE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - JUDITH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

James's emotions burst. He slowly rises from the chair to sit
next to her.

Judith embraces him.

JUDITH
You have to promise me something.

James acknowledges with a nod.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
Promise me. If you're a match or
not, promise me you'll fight for
it.

James cries onto her shoulder and holds her tightly.

JAMES
I will.

INT. HOSPITAL - JUDITH'S ROOM - MIDNIGHT

Judith stretches herself toward Stefanie on the other bed
close enough to toss her phone and ear buds next to her.

The phone has a sticky note that says "Play me".

INT. HOSPITAL - JUDITH'S ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Stefanie wakes to see Judith asleep. She feels the phone
pressed against her and reads the note. Stefanie taps the
phone and it unlocks without a pass code.

There's a video paused on the screen.

She presses play.

JUDITH
(On the video)
I know small steps are hard. I've
not expressed how I feel enough
either. Especially, to you. I don't
know if we'll have another chance.
I've bottled up what I've wanted to
say in music. I want you to hear it
now.

MONTAGE

- Judith practicing.
- Judith smiles at the piano on the stage.
- Song after song play.
- James strums a guitar unaware she's recording.

END MONTAGE

JUDITH (CONT'D)
(On the video)
I love you.

INT. HOSPITAL - JAMES'S ROOM - MORNING

James sleeps comfortably while the sun shines onto his face.

Stefanie, cuddled up on the chair beside him, sleeps with tissues spread across the floor and Judith's phone in hand.

James reaches for Stefanie to wake her.

JAMES

Hey, what are you doing here?

Stefanie's eyes are noticeably red. He realizes that she's cried herself to sleep.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I wanted to save her.

STEFANIE

You're a match.

JAMES

What are we waiting for?

INT. SURGERY ROOM - DAY

Judith and James lay on operating tables across from each other.

The doctors and nurses prep each of them for the transplant.

Judith and James make eye contact as she smiles at him.

JUDITH

You promised.

Their eyes close as the anesthesia takes effect.

INT. SURGERY ROOM - AFTERNOON

The surgeons finish the last bit of the operation.

Judith and James remain unconscious on opposite tables, stable.

The rhythm of heartbeats on electrocardiograms sound like music.

James's heartbeat erratically flutters then crashes.

A flatline of the electrocardiogram fills the room as doctors and nurses rush to bring him back.

They start chest compressions.

A nurse unpacks an AED device to attach to James.

DOCTOR

Clear!

The shock of the AED convulses James's body.

More chest compressions. A bone cracks under the pressure.

They reset the charge.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

CLEAR!

James's body convulses again.

JUDITH (V.O.)

Promise me.

FADE TO:

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MONTHS LATER

The bright Summer sun shines through the windows and highlights the room in golds and yellows.

Stefanie calmly reads a book on coping with anxiety. She practices breathing exercises in the chair.

JUDITH

Is it working?

STEFANIE

Mostly. The medication helps. It feels different. You?

JUDITH

Yeah. But, I miss him.

STEFANIE

Just give it time. Are you ready for your first big show?

JUDITH

Super.

INT. SMALL-SIZED MUSIC VENUE - NIGHT

It's a pack house. The crowd rumbles in anticipation for the performance.

Judith, as beautiful as ever, waits nervously to go on stage.

JUDITH
Are you ready?

JAMES
Are you?

James settles next to her new guitar in hand ready to play with her.

They are close enough to embrace.

FADE TO BLACK