

BEGIN

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2.

A few days later. Late afternoon. Rain. James is watching a horror movie like Friday the 13th while taking notes on his laptop. Sarah, camera bags in hand, comes in from the rain.

JAMES: Hey!
SARAH: Hey.

(He turns off the TV.)

JAMES: Why didn't your little intern help you up with this?
SARAH: I sent her home.
JAMES: You should've buzzed me; I would have come down.
SARAH: I could manage.
JAMES: How'd it go?
SARAH: Fine.
JAMES: You get some good stuff?
SARAH: Yeah.
JAMES: So . . . ?
SARAH: Let me catch my breath.
JAMES: Want something? Tea or uh . . .

SARAH: Something harder would be great.
JAMES: Got it. *(He pours glasses of scotch. As he hands one to her)* So tell me!
SARAH: It's not such a big deal.
JAMES: It is a big deal. Your first assignment in six months? That's a very big deal.
SARAH: How was *your* day?
JAMES: You're looking at it.
SARAH: What're you cooking?
JAMES: That chicken-black olive thing.
SARAH: Again?
JAMES: Thought I'd try not to make it rare this time.
SARAH *(Regarding his laptop)*: What are you working on?
JAMES: My horror movie book.
SARAH: What about the pages for Richard? You promised he'd have it on Friday.
JAMES: I know; he will.
SARAH: You can't blow it off; you've got to do it.
JAMES: I am! I worked on it all day. Now I'm working on *this*.
SARAH: When can I read it?
JAMES: Soon. *(A beat)* You okay? You seem wrecked.
SARAH: Long day.
JAMES: It was too much for you wasn't it? I knew it would be too much.
SARAH: It wasn't that.
JAMES: Didn't I say you weren't ready?
SARAH: Physically I held up just fine. *(Pause)* I had a flash-back.

(Pause.)

JAMES: At the prison? *(She nods)* What was it?
SARAH: Market bombing. Mosul. Couple of years ago.
JAMES: What happened today? What was the trigger?

(Pause.)

SARAH (*A deep breath*): Today . . . I'm shooting these women. The inmates. With the babies they'd had in prison.

JAMES: Yeah . . .

SARAH: And *some* of these ladies are *seriously* bad. I mean: homicide, drug dealing, trying to kill their grandmother for her ATM card, that kind of thing . . . Anyway I'm shooting . . . sort of getting in the zone and this one woman . . . big . . . heavily tattooed with Hell's Angels' kind of skulls with fire coming out of the eye sockets, comes up to me, gets right in my face . . . and looks at me with such . . . contempt . . . (*Brutish voice*) "What you want to take my picture for? Huh?" And . . . I was back in Mosul.

JAMES: Was I with you?

SARAH: You were off doing a story in the south; it was when I was there for the AP.

JAMES: What happened that day? I don't remember.

SARAH: That's because I never told you. I never told anybody.

JAMES: Tell me now. (*She shakes her head. Gently*) Come on. Tell me.

(*Pause.*)

SARAH: The light that day was gorgeous, I remember. (*Pause*) I was sitting in a café with the Reuters guys . . . And a car bomb went off, a block or two away, in this market. And I just *ran* to it, took off. Without even thinking.

(*A beat.*)

The carnage was . . . ridiculous. Exploded produce. Body parts. Eggplants. Women keening. They were digging in the rubble for their children. I started shooting. And suddenly this woman burst out from the smoke . . . covered in blood . . . her skin was raw and red and charred, and her hair was singed—she got so close

I could smell it—and her clothes, her top had melted into her, and she was screaming at me. (*Shouts*) "Go way, go way! No picture, no picture!" And she started pushing me, pushing my camera with her hand on the lens . . .

JAMES: What did you do?

SARAH: Nothing. I kept on shooting. Then, somehow, I ran the hell out of there. I stopped to catch my breath . . . and check out my cameras . . . (*Pause*) There was blood on my lens. (*Moved*) Her blood was smeared on my lens. (*She breaks down*) I feel so ashamed . . .

JAMES: No! Why?

SARAH: It was wrong . . . What I did was so wrong.

JAMES: It wasn't wrong.

SARAH: It was indecent.

JAMES: You were doing your job.

SARAH: They didn't want me there! They didn't want me taking pictures! They lost *children* in that mess! To them it was a sacred place. But there I was, like a, like a *ghoul* with a camera, shooting away. No wonder they wanted to kill me; I would've wanted to kill me, too.

JAMES (*Soothing*): No . . .

SARAH: I live off the suffering of strangers. I built a *career* on the sorrows of people I don't know and will never see again.

JAMES: That's not true. You've helped them. In ways you can't see.

SARAH: Have I? Have I really? (*Pause*) I'm such a fraud.

(*Long pause.*)

JAMES: Hey. (*She looks at him. Pause*) We don't have to do this anymore, you know.

SARAH: What do you mean?

JAMES: We don't have to *do* this. We can stay home. We can *make* a home.

(A beat.)

Y'know? The past few months? Teaching myself how to cook, watching Netflix . . . writing while you napped, listening to you breathe . . . I've been so . . . *(Chokes up)* happy. Y'know? Simple, boring, happy. *(A beat)* For the first time in I don't know how long, I don't have giardia, or some nasty parasite I'm trying to get rid of . . . And my back doesn't ache from sleeping on the ground, or on lousy mattresses in shitty hotels. I realized: Wow, this is what it must feel like to be *comfortable*. I don't think I've ever known that feeling; maybe as a boy I did, I felt safe, but I didn't know what it was. Now I know! I just want to be comfortable! There! I said it! Does that make me a bad person?

SARAH: Of course not.

JAMES: I've been feeling like, we're going *back* there? *Why?* Unfinished business? Fuck unfinished business. I don't need to dodge bullets to feel alive anymore. Or step over mutilated corpses. Or watch children die. I want to watch children *grow*. And take vacations like other people. To . . . I don't know, *dude* ranches. Or Club Med. I don't want to be on a goddamn mission every time I get on a plane! I want to take our kids to Disney World and buy them all the crap they want.

SARAH: Our kids.

JAMES *(Nods, then)*: Let's just do it. We keep putting it off, and putting it off. We're pushing our luck already. Let's just go ahead and do it. Now. Not six months from now. *(Pause)* There'll always be something, some reason to put our lives on hold. The war *du jour*. Well, fuck it. It's our turn now. *(A beat)* Let's stop running.

END

3.

Later that night. The rain has stopped. James, lit only by the TV, reclines on the sofa, watching Invasion of the Body Snatchers. The volume is low. Unseen by him, Sarah is sitting up in bed with his computer on her lap, illuminated by its screen. She gets up purposefully and pauses in the dark to see what he is watching.

JAMES *(Startled)*: Whoa! Didn't see you. What are you looking for?

SARAH: Gotta be a cigarette around here *somewhere* . . .

JAMES: What do you want a cigarette for?

SARAH: I want to smoke it.

JAMES: Don't. You haven't had a cigarette in months.

SARAH: I want one now . . .

(He watches her look through drawers, pockets, etc.)

JAMES: I thought you were sleeping.

SARAH: Never got there.

JAMES: If this was keeping you up . . . You should've told me . . . I would've made it lower.