QUANTUM SUICIDE

written by

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INT. OFFICE

Dozens of cubicles stuffed in an office building.

JAMES MULLER (33) occupies one of these cubicles. A little tall, a little skinny, and his pristine shirt and tie contrasts his puffy and messy hair.

He types on a loud keyboard, and so do his coworkers. The typing produces a symphony of CLICKS and CLACKS.

His cubicle neighbor, MARVIN, rolls back in his office chair and faces James.

    MARVIN
    Where you going for lunch?

    JAMES
    Staying here. Have to finish this spreadsheet.

    MARVIN
    Spreadsheets? Aren't those for us accounting monkeys?

    JAMES
    I just do what they tell me.

    MARVIN
    I know how that is. Are you doing anything after three?

    JAMES
    I have an appointment.

    MARVIN
    Of course.

Marvin rolls back to his desk. After a few seconds of typing, Marvin swings back to James's cubicle.

    MARVIN (CONT'D)
    You know where Kevin went?

Jim keeps his focus on the computer screen.

    JAMES
    Going to guess he's sick.

    MARVIN
    Nah. Cut.

James stops typing.
JAMES
What?

MARVIN
As of yesterday, Kevin does not hold employment here.

JAMES
How?

MARVIN
Budget.

JAMES
Oh God.

MARVIN
Mhmm. Worst part? They made him leave on his birthday.

JAMES
Couldn't that just have been a coincidence?

MARVIN
I'd prefer to think otherwise. It'll make it easier for me to leave the terrible people that let Kevin go on his birthday. But I wouldn't worry if I were you, you've been here what, ten years?

JAMES
Twelve.

MARVIN
See? Nothing to worry about. Plus, Mills loves you.

JAMES
Mills loves everyone.

INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

James sits on a couch while a PSYCHIATRIST holding a notepad sits across from him. She scribbles notes about James.

JAMES
I don't know. I love my family. I have great coworkers. It just feels like I'm useless sometimes.
(MORE)
JAMES (CONT’D)
Like I could just disappear and nobody would know or care. Ever since my dad, you know...

The Psychiatrist nods.

JAMES (CONT’D)
(beat)
It's been hard. I almost went for the bottle yesterday. But I didn't. That was excruciating. And the money... Ohh, the money. A house we can't afford. I can't even look at my lawn anymore without thinking about what it's costing us.

PSYCHIATRIST
You're a strong man, James. I've never seen any patient resist their vices as much as you have. Here's what I recommend: go to your wife. She clearly has an understanding of your financial problems, so figure that out together. Have you told her about these sessions?

JAMES
Not yet.

PSYCHIATRIST
Are you afraid she'll judge you? Think differently about you?

JAMES
No, I don't really know. I guess... I guess I don't want to look weak to her, you know? I was always there. Always with her through the shit thrown her way.

PSYCHIATRIST
It seems like you might be focusing too much on your identity as an anchor. Try to release yourself from that. It's okay to be vulnerable.

James mouths these words back to himself.

"It's okay to be vulnerable."
EXT. JAMES'S HOUSE

James drives up to his house. As he walks into his home, he picks up a watering bucket and sprinkles water on the yellow petunias in the front yard.

He walks inside.

Across the street from James's house, an ordinary-looking man in a T-shirt and khakis snaps a picture of the home.

INT. JAMES'S HOUSE - CONT'D

CALEB, his 6-year-old son, runs up to him.

CALEB
Daddy!

James SWOOPS Caleb off the ground and spins around.

JAMES
Ohh, you've grown!

James lands Caleb on the ground.

His wife, LINDA, walks out of the home office.

LINDA
Hey!

James hugs Linda and gives her a kiss.

LINDA (CONT'D)
How was your day?

JAMES
It was alright. What's that smell?

LINDA
Pot roast.

JAMES
And who do we have to thank?

LINDA
Costco.

James chuckles.
INT. JAME'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - LATER

James, Linda, and Caleb sit around the table and eat their meal. Caleb scratches his fork against his plate.

JAMES
Gentle there, Hercules.

LINDA
Caleb, show dad what you got at the mall.

Caleb excitedly displays his shiny new wristwatch to James.

JAMES
Wow. That is nice!

He looks closer.

JAMES (CONT’D)
But why is the time wrong?

CALEB
If I make it earlier on the watch, I'll have more time for chores!

James chuckles.

JAMES
That's not exactly how it works. See, time goes on even though you might not want it to. There's no real way to change that.

Caleb looks back at his watch, then back at his father.

CALEB
Are you sure?

JAMES
Yep.

Caleb sighs in disappointment.

JAMES (CONT’D)
So I'd recommend you clean your room now instead of trying to bend time to procrastinate.

CALEB
Ugh.

Caleb leaves the table and goes to his room.
Linda playfully punches James on the shoulder.

LINDA
Way to crush dreams, James.

JAMES
I try.

James and Linda put away dishes.

LINDA
I think you have to meet up with Caleb's teacher tomorrow.

JAMES
Why's that?

LINDA
He got punched by some asshole in his class. There was this big fight over whether Batman or Superman is the better superhero. Can you believe that?

JAMES
I guess things don't change too much. I remember getting in fights over stupid things.

James notices something out the window.

LINDA
I worry for him.

James doesn't reply. Instead, he opens the blinds to see a car in the driveway with heavily tinted windows.

It drives away as James stares at it.

LINDA (CONT’D)
James? What's wrong?

JAMES
Has that car been there all day?

LINDA
What car?

James sees the car drive out of the neighborhood. He closes the blinds.
INT. JAMES'S CAR - NEXT DAY

James drives the car with Caleb in the passenger seat.

JAMES
What happened, Caleb?

CALEB
I don't know what you're talking about.

James LAUGHS.

JAMES
Okay. But if push comes to shove, you know bullies aren't going to stop after just one fight.

CALEB
I know.

JAMES
And?

CALEB
He was just being mean.

JAMES
There will always be mean people.

CALEB
He said Superman was better than Batman!

JAMES
But do you know for a fact that's not true?

CALEB
YES!

JAMES
What other people think is important, too.

CALEB
I know.

JAMES
So why'd you fight him?

CALEB
I didn't fight him.
JAMES
What happened then?

CALEB
I called his mom ugly.

James LAUGHS harder.

JAMES
And why'd you do that?

CALEB
He made me feel bad. I didn't mean it. I haven't even seen his mom.

JAMES
You'll have to accept the consequences, Caleb.

CALEB
Yeah...

EXT. CALEB'S SCHOOL - LATER

James gets out of the car and follows Caleb into the school.

JAMES
Have fun!

Caleb runs in. James goes to the office.

INT. CALEB'S SCHOOL - FRONT OFFICE

James sits in the waiting room reading a magazine. He flips through the pages when the PRINCIPAL walks out to take him.

PRINCIPAL
Mr. Muller?

JAMES
Yes? Oh, I'll be there in a sec.

James puts down the magazine and goes into the office.

INT. CALEB'S SCHOOL - FRONT OFFICE - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

The Principal sits at her desk while James sits across from her.
James is a very bright child, he understands everything the teacher tells him, sometimes much earlier than the other children in his classroom.

What's the concern? The fight?

The fight was certainly not behavior that can be tolerated in the school setting, but that isn't necessarily what is most important right now for Caleb.

What is?

Well, his teacher found this in his desk during playtime.

The Principal pulls out a gory picture of a ZOMBIE eating the head of an unsuspecting old man.

Wow.

Exactly. Now, obviously, boys will be boys, but we can't help if there's something Caleb isn't getting enough of.

What are you trying to imply?

Nothing, we were just wondering if you would show him a monster movie every now and then.

Look, I get it. He draws gross stuff. I did growing up. But sometimes, you have to let a kid be a kid. That fighting business is bringing him some punishment. But this... this is frankly ridiculous.

We just have concerns.
JAMES
We all have concerns, miss.

James steps out of the Principal's office.

INT. OFFICE - NEXT DAY

James types on his computer. He stops working on the spreadsheet, looks around, and goes to Google. He searches "strange car espionage." The results range from conspiracy theories to alien speculation to Sci-Fi e-books.

The Office Secretary taps James on the shoulder. He JUMPS back a bit, startled.

SECRETARY
Mr. Muller? The Office Manager would like to see you.

JAMES
Oh, okay.

INT. OFFICE - MANAGER'S OFFICE

The Secretary escorts James into the Manager's office. The Office Manager sits at his desk, decorated with a little Newton's Cradle.

The Manager stands up.

MANAGER
You must be James Muller! Please, have a seat.

James sits across from the Manager.

MANAGER (CONT’D)
As you know, your branch was bought out by our parent company, so I would just like to say-

JAMES
Where's Mills?

MANAGER
I will get to tha-

JAMES
MANAGER
Every previous branch manager has been replaced by hires from the parent company.

JAMES
Bullshit! If you're firing me, I need Mills here. I need Mills to face me and tell me I'm fired. I didn't sell my soul to this company for twelve years to have some outside hire shmuck cut me out.

MANAGER
I understand your frustration.

JAMES
No, you really don't. I was this close. This close to a promotion, a raise... something. I need that. And I was going to get it, because Mills promised me, his loyal software hamster, something. And if you knew Mills, you knew his word was his vow.

James sits back in his chair.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Except now, apparently.

After a beat of silence, James leans forward and lifts a steel ball on the Newton's Cradle and lets it go, creating a rhythmic CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK...

INT. OFFICE - LATER
James walks back to his cubicle. Marvin stands up.

MARVIN
They kept me! Can you believe it?

James sits down.

MARVIN (CONT'D)
...James?

James stares at his computer screen. He's blank. He doesn't know what to say.

The Secretary walks up to the cubicle and places a box labeled JAMES MULLER on his desk.
Marvin steps back, and places his hand on his mouth in shock.

EXT. OFFICE

With a box of his papers in hand, James walks out of the office building. He places the box on the ground and KICKS it, causing papers to fly everywhere. He sits down on a nearby bench and slouches over.

James looks up and sees a man in a trench-coat watching him from a distant street. James walks into his car.

INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE - LATER

James sitting on a couch and the Psychiatrist sitting across from him, again.

JAMES
I got fired today. And I feel like I'm being watched. God, I know I'm being watched.

PSYCHIATRIST
And how do you know that?

JAMES
A car in my driveway. A guy watching me. It's probably bullshit, but I can feel it sometimes. Is it paranoia?

PSYCHIATRIST
Just because it's paranoia doesn't mean it's an incorrect assertion. Although it most likely is an incorrect assertion. These feelings often come from guilt or insecurities. I doubt you have a disorder that causes these symptoms, but I can't be too sure. If you keep feeling this by next week, I'll try to find the appropriate medication.

JAMES
Thanks doc.

EXT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE - LATER

As James exits the building, he sees a STRANGE MAN watching him from the distance.
JAMES
Hey!
The Man simply stares and doesn't reply!

JAMES (CONT’D)
HEY!

James walks slowly over to him, and the Man slowly backs up.

JAMES (CONT’D)
I'm not here to hurt you. I just wanna know who you are.

The Strange Man SPRINTS from the scene, and James SPRINTS after him.

JAMES (CONT’D)
JUST TELL ME WHO YOU ARE!

EXT. SIDEWALK - CONT'D

James CHASES the Man. He's clearly a faster and better runner than James is.

James wheezes and can't quite catch up. The Strange Man gets in a car and drives away. James stops to catch his breath. He watches as the car leaves his sight.

INT. JAMES'S HOUSE

James walks into his house, and Caleb runs up to greet him.

CALEB
Daddy!

JAMES
Hey sport!

James pats Caleb on the head. Linda walks towards him, and James gives her a peck on the cheek.

LINDA
Hey hun. How was your day?

JAMES
It was...
(beat)
Okay.

LINDA
Did something go wrong?
Beat.

JAMES
Kevin got fired.

LINDA
That's terrible!

JAMES
Yeah. He was a good guy.

LINDA
Bummer. I can't believe it. He'll go forward though. I'm sure there was a reason.

INT. JAMES'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

James washes dishes. Linda comes up behind him and gives an embrace. James touches Linda's arm.

LINDA
So I guess you finally decided to do the dishes.

JAMES
I thought it was too long since I've been useful around here.

LINDA
Aw, don't say that.

The doorbell RINGS.

JAMES
I'll get it.

James takes off his rubber gloves and walks to the door.

EXT. JAMES'S HOUSE - CONT'D

James opens the door to see a cardboard package addressed to him in big, bold letters: JAMES MULLER. No addresses.

He takes the box inside.

INT. JAMES'S HOUSE

James places the box on the floor. He takes his Swiss Army knife and slices it open.
LINDA
Who was it?

JAMES
Some... pranksters.

He takes a small container and opens it. It's a tiny black headset the size of a penny.

LINDA
Should we call the cops?

JAMES
No, no.

He takes out a blank envelope from the box, and opens it to reveal a folded piece of paper with some lines on it. He unfolds it and sees that it's a diagram of something: one box at the bottom of the paper, which branches out to two boxes, those two boxes branching out to four boxes, etc., etc., until the top of the paper is absolutely filled with boxes.

James unfolds another paper, this time it looks like a contract with lines to put signatures on the bottom.

Another sheet of paper in the envelope says this message: "Congratulations! You have been selected for a special government program. Please wear and press the button on the headset to begin."

Looking at and holding the headset, he can't decide whether he should go ahead with it.

James takes the box and the headset into his bedroom.

INT. JAMES'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - CONT'D

He sits at a desk in his bedroom.

Finally, he wears the headset and presses the button on the side of it.

A ROBOTIC VOICE fizzles into his ear.

ROBOTIC VOICE
Hello! My name is EMILIO, your artificially intelligent guide. Please press the button on the side of your headset to select your gender: male, female, or other. Again, that is male-

James presses the button.
BEEP.

ROBOTIC VOICE (CONT’D)
You have identified yourself as:
MALE. Please press the button once
if the following address is
correct, and twice if incorrect.
1283 West Sycamore Ave.

James presses the button once.

ROBOTIC VOICE (CONT’D)
We have identified you as: JAMES
MULLER. Age: 33. Please press your
button once if this is correct, and
twice if-

James presses the button once, again.

ROBOTIC VOICE (CONT’D)
Congratulations! The identification
process is now completed. Please
wait one moment to connect you to
your human guide, WYATT.

Generic elevator music plays for about three seconds.

The music stops, and someone picks up.

WYATT (V.O.)
Hello James.

JAMES
Wyatt was your name?

WYATT
Yes indeed.

JAMES
Okay Wyatt, I"m having a little
trouble understanding what this is
all about...

WYATT
Don't worry about it, Jim. Uh, do
you mind if I call you Jim?

JAMES
Not at all.

WYATT
I'll start from the beginning. I
assume you aren't familiar with the
concept of the Multiverse?
JAMES
You'd be right.

WYATT
Essentially what it means is that we exist in one of infinite universes. These infinite universes are the result of decisions we've made, along with trillions of other particle-based events.

JAMES
I think I'm kinda getting it...

WYATT
This concept is explained a bit by the thought experiment known as "Quantum Suicide."

JAMES
That sounds a little intense.

WYATT
It is. Do you see the diagram?

JAMES
Hold on.

James pulls out the piece of paper with boxes drawn on it.

JAMES (CONT’D)
Yep.

WYATT
Think of each of those boxes as Universes. The first one is the one you know, the one you are in right now. Let's say there's a gun that has a fifty-fifty chance of firing a round in your head. That means, in one universe, you live. But in the other, you're dead.

JAMES
Wait wait wait, so you guys are going to have this probability gun or whatever fired at me, and on the fifty percent chance that I live, then... what?

WYATT
You will explore and collect data for us. What you see different about the day.

(MORE)
WYATT (CONT’D)
Then you'll come back, report the
data for us.

JAMES
How are you so sure I'll just
gamble my life?

WYATT
Nobody spends fourteen hundred
dollars on therapy and not have
thoughts, Jim.

JAMES
How do you know...

WYATT
United States Government, remember?

JAMES
Right.

WYATT
And you'll be monetarily
compensated, too. Eight hundred
dollars every time you take the
chance.

Beat.

JAMES
Say that again.

WYATT
Eight hundred dollars?

Silence.

WYATT (CONT’D)
Jim?

JAMES
I just... I just need a moment.
Where do I go?

INT. JAMES'S HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - LATER

James opens the front door, but Linda comes up behind him.

LINDA
Where are you going?
JAMES
There's an emergency meeting at the office.

LINDA
Did something happen?

JAMES
I'm not sure.

INT. JAMES'S CAR - LATER
James drives his car while Wyatt gives him directions.

WYATT
Turn left here.

James swerves left.

JAMES
Wyatt, how exactly do you know where I am?

WYATT
I can track you from a GPS and the detector installed on your headset.

JAMES
That seems a little reckless.

WYATT
That's because it is. Right.

James turns right.

EXT. UNMARKED BUILDING - LATER
A plain, small building with no signs. James drives up to it.

INT. UNMARKED BUILDING
James walks into the small building. It's empty.

WYATT
Look in the janitor's closet.

A door on the wall labelled JANITOR'S CLOSET. James opens the door to find a room with wire-covered walls. He walks inside.
INT. JANITOR'S CLOSET - CONT'D

A gun barrel at one end of the room. A button at the other.

JAMES
What have I walked into...

WYATT
Only the single greatest leap into Multiverse research made in the history of mankind.

JAMES
That's a bit of pressure.

WYATT
To be expected.

James feels some of the wires. He walks over to the button.

JAMES
So when I press this button, cash just... shows up?

WYATT
Essentially. But please make sure NOT to press it too many times. It'll deliver drastic consequences, and no one can cope with too much change in their reality.

JAMES
I promise I'll try.

WYATT
Are you ready?

JAMES
This is the closest to death I've ever been.

WYATT
It's still fifty-fifty.

James shuts his eyes.

WYATT (CONT’D)
Whenever you're ready.

James still has his eyes closed. His fingers are trembling. He then SLAMS the button, and a RUMBLE is heard.

Nothing. The gun didn't fire. James opens his eyes, and falls to the ground.
WYATT (CONT’D)
What was that? Did you fall?

James chuckles. Then he LAUGHS. He LAUGHS until he CRIES.

JAMES
Oh, FUCK! I did it! I'm still here!

WYATT
Are you alright?

JAMES
I'm better than ALRIGHT! I'm great! I feel like I could fly!

WYATT
Just don't try it.

James wobbles his legs and stands up.

INT. UNMARKED BUILDING

He slowly makes his way out of the Janitor's Closet to see an envelope of cash on the floor in front of him. He picks it up.

WYATT
Now remember, the more times you press that button and you live, the more your world will change. We cannot control the Universe you will travel to, only the fact that you could do it.

JAMES
Understood.

James sprints out of the building and YELLS into the air.

EXT. JAMES'S HOUSE

James drives back to his home, envelope in hand. He gets out of his car and runs to the front door when he notices: the yellow petunias that were on his yard or no longer yellow petunias. They are now RED ROSES.

Taken aback, James stares for a beat.

JAMES
Wyatt?
WYATT
Yes?

JAMES
There's roses on my yard.

WYATT
What's that?

JAMES
There's roses on my yard. I had petunias before.

WYATT
Good, we're seeing changes already. Whenever you experience this, make sure to tell me.

He walks inside.

INT. JAMES'S HOUSE

James closes the front door behind him, and Caleb runs up.

CALEB
Poppy!

JAMES
Hey, little man!

James picks him up.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Ohhh, you're getting bigger than your old man!

He puts him down.

JAMES (CONT'D)
How was school?

CALEB
Good.

Linda walks up to him.

LINDA
Hey stranger.

JAMES
How are you?
LINDA
Work was terrible. As always.

JAMES
Don't say that.

LINDA
I can't say the truth now?

JAMES
You know what I mean.

James kisses Linda on the forehead.

EXT. JAMES'S HOUSE - NIGHT

It's dark outside, except for the patio light. James sits in his backyard. He talks to Wyatt through the headset while drinking a cup of coffee.

JAMES
My son called me "poppy." He never calls me poppy.

WYATT
Things like that should be normal. Slight behaviors from people you know intimately will tick you off immediately.

JAMES
Will I get used to it?

WYATT
I don't think so. Your universe changes every time you press that button. It'll be impossible.

JAMES
It's getting hard already.

WYATT
You're a brave man, James.

JAMES
I don't know if that's true.

WYATT
Any man willing to change his entire life for the advancement of humanity is a brave soul.
JAMES
I didn't do it for advancement.

James takes a sip of coffee.

INT. JANITOR'S CLOSET - NEXT DAY

James stares down the barrel of the gun.

WYATT
If you don't feel you can do it, feel free to let me know. Most subjects that survive the first day opt out on the second.

JAMES
I'm not the guy to quit.

James presses the button.

CLICK.

He swipes some sweat from his forehead.

EXT. UNMARKED BUILDING - CONT'D

James walks out with the envelope of money in hand.

WYATT
Forgive me if I'm intruding, but why would you stay in a job at a company that didn't give you a raise for twelve years straight?

JAMES
I keep forgetting just how creepy the government can be.

WYATT
I'm sorry, I didn't mean to-

JAMES
No it's fine.

James gets in his car.

INT. JAMES'S CAR - CONT'D

He starts up the car, but doesn't start driving. Instead he sits, talking to Wyatt.
JAMES
I was just a kid. Fresh out of University. I didn't really have anywhere to go. Until I went to this job fair. This guy in his fifties, maybe older, comes up to me -- keep in mind, this is a job fair, students are supposed to be sucking up to the companies, not the other way around -- he comes up to me and says "I like your shoes." I was wearing these disgusting sneakers that were white when I got them, but gray when I wore them to this fair. Anyway, we start talking, and eventually I get an offer. It's more money than I've ever made in my life. So obviously I take it. Later, I understood that a lot of money to a newly-graduated student isn't exactly a lot of money to a guy with a family, and a car, and a house.

WYATT
So why did you maintain the same position for such a long time?

JAMES
I always thought I would get some kind of upgrade. I think I lied to myself. Deep down, I knew I'd never move up.

WYATT
So you stayed in the same position because of nihilism?

JAMES
Not exactly. I stayed, because I thought finding something better or asking for more would be a kind of betrayal. Like I'd be a homeless guy demanding more from a millionaire who just gave me a sandwich or something.

WYATT
That makes no sense.

JAMES
Lots of things I did make no sense. Most of them I regret.
James backs out of the parking space.

INT. JAMES'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATER

James sifts through his closet of stuff. He looks through his clothes and a binder of pictures.

    JAMES
    Nothing different here.

    WYATT
    Just make sure to be thorough.

James puts back the picture binder, but spots a shoebox in the back of the closet. He pulls it out.

Opening the shoebox slowly, he sees the old, gray sneakers he wore to the job fair.

    JAMES
    These are it.

    WYATT
    What?

    JAMES
    The shoes.

James smiles.

    JAMES (CONT'D)
    I hate these shoes.

James looks over and sees his box, labelled "JAMES MULLER".

INT. OFFICE - LATER

The workers at the office, going about their day. The Office Manager, accompanied by his Secretary talks to an employee.

James walks in, wearing the old shoes.

    WYATT
    Jim... what exactly are you doing here? I am actually very confused.

He walks over to the Manager and taps him on the shoulder.

The Manager turns around and looks surprised at James.
MANAGER
Mr. Muller! Wh-what are you doing here?

JAMES
I'm here to take it back.

MANAGER
Take what back?

SECRETARY
(whispering)
Should I call security?

MANAGER
Hold on. James, what do you want?

Marvin walks up to them.

MARVIN
James... what are you doing here?

James stands, silent.

WYATT
Don't do anything crazy now, Jim.

MARVIN
You're really freaking me out right now, man...

James clenches his fist. He PUNCHES the Manager, and he falls to the ground, nose bleeding.

The Secretary SHRIEKS and runs out to get help.

MARVIN (CONT'D)
What the FUCK dude!

WYATT
Jim! JIM! What are you DOING!

The Manager coughs up blood.

James stares at what he's done. He stoops down.

JAMES
You brought this on yourself.

James leaves the scene. He stops near a wastebasket, takes off his shoes, and THROWS them out. Victorious, he runs out of the building.
INT. JAMES'S CAR – CONT'D

James drives barefoot. All the windows are open, so his hair goes insane in the wind.

He yells, at the top of his lungs:

JAMES
WHOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!

WYATT
I have SO many questions! Why did you do that?!

JAMES
Because I can, Wyatt! I don't have to have that bullshit newbie tell me what to do! I make eight-hundred in the press of a button!

James HONKS his horn.

WYATT
Please don't go off the rails on this, Jim! It won't end well!

JAMES
You just gave me the opportunity of a lifetime, Wyatt.

James pushes his foot further into the gas pedal.

JAMES (CONT’D)
You gave me the opportunity to choose.

WYATT
But what if you die? What if the gun fires?

JAMES
Then the world will have one less body of dead weight. And Linda will find a better man, and Caleb will find a better father. But until then, I'll make enough cash for them to last years.

(beat)
And I'll be free...

James dials a number on his cellphone.
INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE - SAME

The Psychiatrist reads a book at her desk. She gets a call.

    PSYCHIATRIST
    Hello?
    (beat)
    Mr. Muller? Sorry, I can't hear you too well.
    (beat)
    Are-are you sure?
    (beat)
    Okay. Goodbye, Mr. Muller.

She hangs up, and pulls out her schedule. On the 3:30 slot, she crosses out: APPOINTMENT - JAMES MULLER.

INT. JAMES'S HOUSE - LATER

James BURSTS in the door, and Caleb runs up to him.

    CALEB
    Poppy!!

James SWOOPS Caleb off the floor.

    JAMES
    How's it going!

With Caleb over his shoulder, James passionately GRABS Linda and kisses her on the lips.

James lets go. He notices his wife's hair is RED instead of blonde. He backs up a bit.

    LINDA
    Wow, what happened to you?

For a couple seconds, he stares at her hair.

    JAMES
    (beat)
    Um, I have good news.

    LINDA
    And what would that be?

    JAMES
    The car? The house? Everything... payed off.

Linda backs up. She puts her hand on her mouth, and her eyes well up.
LINDA

How?

James puts Caleb down.

JAMES

Got a raise. We can finally get caught up on every single payment.

Linda falls into James's arms.

LINDA

Thank you. Thank you thank you.

Linda releases the hug and wipes her moist eyes.

JAMES

So your... hair...

LINDA

You noticed?

She bobs her hair.

JAMES

What'd you did to it?

LINDA

Got it cut yesterday. Do you like it this way?

JAMES

I love it.

INT. JANITOR'S CLOSET - DAY

James presses the button. CLICK.

WYATT

Jim, I don't think what you did yesterday was such a great idea.

JAMES

I'm finally feeling alive. And I've paid all of my family's expenses off. Do you know how enlightening all of this is?

WYATT

I understand, but-
JAMES
No you don't, Wyatt. You're not a lab rat being paid a shit ton of cash to press a button.

WYATT
A button that can kill you, Jim.

JAMES
It hasn't happened yet.

WYATT
That's a common logical coattail people use to justify things.

JAMES
What do you mean?

WYATT
A guy walks to a roulette table. He's informed that black's been coming up for hours. Two hundred times, it's come up red. So this guy, he assumes "hey, red keeps coming up, I'll put it on red. It won't change now." And it does. Black comes up. And he thinks: man, I have terrible luck. It's not luck. It's chance. Beautiful, insurmountable chance.

JAMES
But couldn't the guy have just as easily said, "red's gone all night, and black has to come up soon"?

WYATT
See, that's the thing. There's no pattern. It's just chaos. You can't figure out any of it out.

JAMES
What I do know is, if I die, it'll be to provide.

James moves closer to the button again.

WYATT
I wouldn't do that if I were you.

JAMES
Changes have been small, Wyatt.
WYATT
Sooner or later you'll lose your
touch with the original world, Jim.

JAMES
I think I was already out of touch
before all of this.

James SLAMS the button again.

INT. JAMES'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - AFTERNOON
James, Linda, and Caleb sit around the dining room table.
They eat dinner, except for Caleb, who picks at his food.

JAMES
Hey, Caleb. Can I see your watch?

CALEB
Sure.

Caleb extends his arm to James. James sees his wrist, and
pulls something out of his pocket.

JAMES
You wanna see something cool?

Caleb nods. James shows Caleb the expensive WRISTWATCH he
took from his pocket.

CALEB
Whoa...

JAMES
This is a watch that can last you
forever. It's made of silver, and
this part is made of real leather.

CALEB
And you're giving it to me?

JAMES
Yep.

James takes off the watch Caleb had on his wrist, and puts
the new one on.

LINDA
What do you say, Caleb?

CALEB
Thank you.
JAMES
You're welcome bud.

CALEB
Can I be excused?

JAMES
Sure.

Caleb leaves the table to go to his room.

LINDA
You're just Santa Claus to him now.

JAMES
I hope he doesn't break it.

LINDA
So all the talk about that watch lasting his entire life was just bullshit?

Linda and James LAUGH.

JAMES
I guess you have to lie a little bit to get your point across.

Linda punches James playfully.

The doorbell RINGS.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I'll get it.

EXT. JAMES'S HOUSE - CONT'D

James opens the front door and sees a MAN IN BLUE holding an envelope and standing there.

MAN IN BLUE
Are you James Muller?

JAMES
Yes... do I know you?

MAN IN BLUE
Nope. But-

The Man in Blue hands the envelope to James.

MAN IN BLUE (CONT'D)
-You've been served.
James closes the door.

INT. JAMES'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - CONT'D

James goes into his bedroom and opens the envelope. It is a legal letter, and James reads immediately:

FEE OF $1,220,000 FOR USE OF VIOLENT ASSAULT AGAINST ULRICH HANSEN...

James collapses on the bed and covers his face with the letter.

JAMES
Shiiiiiiit...

James lays there for a beat. Then he pulls out his cellphone and dials a number.

JAMES (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Hey, could we meet up somewhere?
(beat)
Yeah, that sounds good. Five o'clock?
(beat)
Alright.

James hangs up.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - LATER - 5 O'CLOCK

James sits at a table with a cup of coffee. He takes a sip and twiddles his thumbs. He looks over at a clock: 5:03. He looks in his coffee. A black void that shows his reflection.

He takes another sip, and Melvin walks in wearing a hoodie.

He sits across from James.

MELVIN
Hey James.

JAMES
Melvin.

MELVIN
Why'd you call me over here?

JAMES
My wife used to work here.
MELVIN
No, I mean, why did you call me here? For what reason?

James takes a sip of coffee.

JAMES
I got sued.

James slides the letter to melvin. Melvin picks it up and reads it.

MELVIN
Holy shit...

JAMES
Yeah.

MELVIN
Are you going to court?

JAMES
I don't know. I'm going to try to settle out of court.

MELVIN
That's insane.

JAMES
It's worth it to try.

Melvin puts the letter on the table.

MELVIN
James... why'd you do it?

JAMES
I wanted to take my dignity back.

MELVIN
What dignity did they take from you? People get fired every day. Plus, how did you get fired? I knew, in my mind, there was no way they could fire you. You were too loyal, too hard of a worker.

JAMES
I could've fought. But I didn't.

MELVIN
Why not?
JAMES
If there's anyone that would be
talking down to me, it shouldn't
have been that loser Manager. It
should've been Mills. The guy who
hired me, and the only guy who
could rightfully fire me.

MELVIN
James...
(beat)
Mills was fired. You can't hold on
to shit like that.

JAMES
I worked, and worked, and worked.
And I knew I was getting a
promotion. But then the branch gets
bought out, and now I'm lost.

A WAITRESS walks up to their table.

WAITRESS
Is there anything I can get for
you?

MELVIN
I'll have a coffee. Black, two
creams on the side. Do you have
those bear claws? The ones with
almonds on them?

WAITRESS
Yes we do.

MELVIN
I'll take one of those.

The Waitress walks off.

JAMES
I have principles, Melvin.

MELVIN
Fuck principles. It's a dog eat dog
world. It's survival.

JAMES
What if you had the chance? The
chance to shift everything you
know? The chance to change your
reality? I have that chance now.
MELVIN
Punching your old boss in the face can't change your reality, James.

JAMES
You don't know that. When I hit him, I felt like I was powerful. I've never been powerful. But at that moment, I was the most respected person in the room.

MELVIN
And was it worth over a million?

JAMES
I don't know yet.

MELVIN
I can't make any of these decisions for you, James. And I'm not going to tell you what you want to hear.

JAMES
And what do I want to hear?

MELVIN
That what you did was right. That this isn't insane. And that I support you every step of the way. I don't support you. You're my friend, but I can't say what you did was right. You're my friend, but I don't even know how you could do something like that.

The Waitress brings out the bear claw and coffee.

MELVIN (CONT'D)
Thanks, hun.

Melvin digs into his bear claw.

MELVIN (CONT'D)
Are you going crazy, James?

James sits back in his chair.

JAMES
Maybe I am.
INT. JAMES'S HOUSE - GARAGE - LATER

James looks around the garage. He goes through boxes and shelves, until he comes across a BRIEFCASE. He takes the case and opens the garage door.

EXT. JAMES'S HOUSE - CONT'D

James gets in his car, passing by the flowers in his front yard that are now DAISIES.

INT. JAMES'S CAR - CONT'D

James drives, and Wyatt gets on the headset.

    WYATT
    I may have eavesdropped a bit on your conversation.

    JAMES
    I forgot you were on.

    WYATT
    I don't blame you. I have to say, James, whatever you're about to do, I don't think you should do it.

    JAMES
    And what am I about to do?

    WYATT
    I think you're going to press the button in that room until you get enough money to pay off that lawsuit.

    JAMES
    DING DING DING!

    WYATT
    Jim, please. You'd only hurt yourself.

    JAMES
    What could possibly happen, Wyatt? My kid's hair changes a bit. My wife likes the fourth Mission Impossible better than the first. My house has a smaller yard. It's all been small changes, Wyatt. At this point it feels like I'm getting cash to do nothing.
You have to understand the consequences. The changes have been minor so far, yes, but you could go to a Universe you didn't want. One that's far too different for you to handle. Don't-

James Cuts him off by shutting off the headset. He keeps driving to the building.

EXT. UNMARKED BUILDING - LATER

James pulls up to the building. He gets out of the car with his empty briefcase and walks in.

From a distance, a guy in a DIRTY HOODIE looks on.

INT. JANITOR'S CLOSET - CONT'D

James presses the button. CLICK. He presses it again. CLICK. Over and over again. CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-

Enough times for James to get the money he needs.

INT. UNMARKED BUILDING - CONT'D

A PILE of envelopes filled with cash greets him in the lobby. He takes the envelopes and puts them into his briefcase.

EXT. UNMARKED BUILDING - CONT'D

James walks out of the building. The briefcase is full of money now, and he is visibly struggling to carry it.

The guy with the Dirty Hoodie loads his pistol and puts it into his pocket. He walks to James.

James gets closer to the car, and Dirty Hoodie BLOCKS James.

DIRTY HOODIE
Hey bud!

JAMES
Shit... hey, I don't want any trouble...

DIRTY HOODIE
Me neither. What's in the case?
JAMES
Nothing.

DIRTY HOODIE
Bullshit! Nobody walks in a shady fucking building with a briefcase and comes out with "nothing" in that briefcase.

JAMES
Listen, I'm in a rut, and I need-

DIRTY HOODIE
We're ALL in a rut, man! And you're certainly not in the worst one. You and your fucking shirt and tie... you're not in a rut, you're in a goddamn puddle.

JAMES
If you just let me go now, I promise not to call the cops.

DIRTY HOODIE
What the fuck are the cops gonna do to me, rich boy? I'm a street rat without a record. I can disappear. So let me see your briefcase.

JAMES
(beat)
I don't think so.

The guy looks even angrier. He pulls out his pistol and pushes it against James's chest.

DIRTY HOODIE
Hand over the goods...

JAMES
I'm not afraid of your gun. You'd just be putting me out of my misery.

DIRTY HOODIE
You're miserable with a case packed with cash?

JAMES
You'd be surprised.

He pulls the TRIGGER on the pistol. CLICK.
DIRTY HOODIE

What the-

He pulls the trigger again. CLICK.

DIRTY HOODIE (CONT'D)

What the fuck?!

James takes the gun and pulls the trigger to his head. CLICK. He takes the gun and FIRES it in the air. BANG.

The guy in the Dirty Hoodie looks terrified out of his mind.

DIRTY HOODIE (CONT'D)

Who are you?

JAMES

I don't know...

The man RUNS to the other side of the street without the gun. James throws the gun on the pavement and gets in the car.

INT. JAMES'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATER

James sets the briefcase full of cash on the bed and opens it. The case is brimming with money, and James stares at it.

He turns on his headset.

WYATT

(angrily)
What was that?

JAMES

I couldn't handle it. I didn't know what else I could do.

WYATT

I was worried.

JAMES

I'm sorry.

WYATT

Why didn't you do that the other times I was nagging?

JAMES

Because this time, I knew it was possible you could convince me.
WYATT
(beat)
Just don't do it again.

JAMES
I'll try not to.

WYATT
What happened afterwards?

JAMES
I got mugged.

WYATT
You better not be fucking with me.

JAMES
No, I'm serious. A guy came up and shot me. Well, tried to shoot me.

WYATT
You're sounding strangely calm about this.

JAMES
He couldn't shoot me. It wouldn't work. It just... clicked.

WYATT
That's strange.

JAMES
I think the reason I'm so calm is because I would've been fine if he actually shot me. Does that have anything to do with the experiment?

WYATT
Coincidences happen, James. Are you going to the police?

JAMES
I don't think so.

INT. OFFICE - MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY

James walks into the office in a suit and brings in the briefcase. The Manager stands up.

MANAGER
Leave here.

The Secretary runs in.
SECRETARY
I am so sorry, I tried to stop him but he just kept going through. I called security.

JAMES
There's no need for that.

James DROPS the suitcase on his desk. The Manager opens it and sees the cash.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Your compensation.

James sarcastically bows down to him and leaves. As he walks through the office, he gets TACKLED by security guards.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

INT. JAMES'S HOUSE
- James passionately kissing Linda against a wall.

INT. JANITOR'S CLOSET
- James pushes the button.

EXT. CARNIVAL
- James goes on a Ferris wheel with Linda and Caleb.

INT. JANITOR'S CLOSET
- James pushes the button.

INT. JAMES'S CAR
- Linda's eyes are closed. James takes out a jewelry box and opens it. She opens her eyes and screams with joy when she sees a ring with a huge diamond.

INT. JANITOR'S CLOSET
- James presses the button, again.

END MONTAGE.
INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - NIGHT

James wears a blue suit and Linda wears a black flowy dress. They sit at a small table. Classical music plays. Linda's hair is now black, as opposed to blonde or red.

James pulls the chair out for Linda, and she sits down. James sits across from her.

LINDA
I'm so glad we found time for this.

JAMES
It's easy enough to find a sitter if you're willing to pay for it.

LINDA
How much?

JAMES
I don't want to say.

Linda LAUGHS.

LINDA
How many chances do we get to do something like this?

JAMES
Let's not think about that, and just enjoy it.

LINDA
Good call.

A WAITER in a tuxedo walks up to the table.

WAITER
Would you two like to start off with any drinks today?

JAMES
Sure. Could we get two chardonnays?

LINDA
Honey... I can't drink...

JAMES
What?

LINDA
(whispering)
I've been sober for three months.
JAMES
Right... Right! Oh, sorry. I am so sorry, I completely forgot.

LINDA
It's all alright.

JAMES
Could we get two waters instead?

WAITER
Certainly.

The Waiter takes the drink menus and leaves.

JAMES
How's work?

LINDA
Work?

JAMES
Yeah, how's it going for you?

LINDA
(beat)
Are you okay, James?

JAMES
Yeah, what's wrong?

LINDA
... James, I don't work.

JAMES
What are you talking about-

James stops and realizes what he's done.

LINDA
You're scaring me right now.

JAMES
I just... forgot.

LINDA
How could you forget? I've been stay at home for years now.

JAMES
I'm sorry, I really am.

Linda smiles.
LINDA
You're just messing around, huh?

James throws up his hands.

JAMES
You got me.

Linda chuckles.

LINDA
I wouldn't ever have taken you as the type of guy to joke around about these things.

JAMES
I tried.

LINDA
I'm sure you did.

The Waiter places glasses of water on their table.

JAMES
Thank you.

LINDA
Thanks.

Linda takes a sip of water.

LINDA (CONT'D)
So, you know the show Caleb always watches? Flibbers?

JAMES
Yeah, uh, Flubbers, I think.

LINDA
Yeah. Anyway, I was watching an episode with him and one of the Flubbers there was just like you.

JAMES
Really?

LINDA
Yeah, it always read old novels and it even worked as a teacher. Which I thought was weird, considering these Flubber thingies look exactly the same age.
JAMES
Wow, that's pretty funny.

James takes a sip of water.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Wait, teacher?

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - BATHROOM - CONT'D

James sweats at his forehead while he rushes into the bathroom. He turns on the faucet and scoops water in the sink on his face.

He looks at himself in the mirror in front of him. His face is red and his eyes are jittery.

James backs up from the sink and takes the headset out of his pocket. He clumsily sticks it in his ears, his hands shaking. He powers it on.

JAMES
Wyatt? Are you there?

WYATT
Twenty-four-seven, Jim. I just spilled coffee over my pants so I'm wiping that up at the moment. What's up

JAMES
I'm in a dilemma.

WYATT
Explain.

JAMES
My wife and I went to dinner. I'm a good treat for us, especially after all the money I made from your weird science experiment.

WYATT
Okay.

JAMES
My wife is not my wife.

WYATT
Go on.
JAMES
She's... different. She's a completely different person. She doesn't drink, is stay-at-home, and apparently watches kids' shows with my son. She HATES kids' shows.

WYATT
The version of your wife that you know hates kids' shows. This version can bare them. You just have to accept this as your new reality, Jim.

JAMES
But that's not even the end of it. She knows me as something different, too. Apparently I'm a teacher in this universe and I like reading old novels.

WYATT
Just play along. Sooner or later, you'll get the hang of it.

JAMES
This is just surprising. I knew it was going to happen, but I didn't realize it would be this shocking.

WYATT
Don't worry. We're all people. This would be jarring for everyone.

JAMES
How long before she catches on?

WYATT
I don't really have an answer to that. It's your decision.

James looks down, about to take the headset off. He doesn't.

JAMES
Wait, if I'm here, and my wife knows me as something else, where did the James of this universe go?

WYATT
We have the means, we just don't have the answers.

(MORE)
WYATT (CONT’D)
The leading theory is that, in every iteration of the universe, every version of James takes part in this experiment and crosses over to every other James in the Multiverse. Unfortunately, this is a very thin theory and one that can't really answer too many of our questions.

JAMES
So you're telling me some other guy who's not me, but is a different version of me, is fucking my wife right now?

WYATT
To be fair, you're doing that with someone else's wife.

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - CONT'D

James walks to the table and takes his seat. Linda smiles at him, and asks:

LINDA
James... what changed?

JAMES
What's that?

LINDA
I mean... you're so different. Did something happen when you were gone that day?

JAMES
What day?

LINDA
Last month. You were gone for a few hours. You said it was something for work, but ever since then, you've been acting a bit strange.

JAMES
Strange?

LINDA
I mean, it's just different talking to you. Did something happen?
JAMES
No, no, absolutely not.

LINDA
Maybe we just haven't been spending enough time together. You know, with your new promotion and such.

JAMES
That would make sense.

LINDA
James, I think we're drifting apart. I just don't feel as close to you as I did when I first met you.

JAMES
What are you talking about?

LINDA
I'm saying, maybe we should spend some time off, you know? Cool down a little bit.

JAMES
We have a kid, Linda.

LINDA
Yeah, but he can spend some time at your house, and he can come with me. Switch off. It doesn't have to be hostile.

JAMES
What are you talking about?

LINDA
I'm talking about taking a break.

JAMES
Linda, DIVORCE is not taking a break! We've been married more than ten years.

Linda backs up a bit from the table.

LINDA
James... we're not married.

JAMES
Oh God.
LINDA
What are you talking about...

JAMES
I'm so sorry, Linda-

LINDA
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?!

Tears form in Linda's eyes.

JAMES
Don't... please don't go...

LINDA
Who are you James?

Linda stands up.

JAMES
Please, please forgive me.

LINDA
If this is a joke, it sure doesn't feel like it right now.

JAMES
I promise I can explain, Linda.

Linda runs out of the restaurant.

LINDA
Bye, James.

JAMES
Linda? Linda?! LINDA!

EXT. FANCY RESTAURANT - CONT'D

James runs out, and sees Linda driving out. He sprints after the car, but he can't keep up. She's far gone.

INT. JANITOR'S CLOSET

James runs in, swinging the door open.

WYATT
Jim, I told you, we can do this. Just give yourself another chance.
JAMES
Linda is a stranger to me. I want Linda back. I need to go to a Universe where I get a second chance. I need a chance.

James SLAMS the button multiple times. A chorus of successive CLICKS go off in chaotic fashion.

WYATT
Are you sure this is a good idea?

JAMES
If I can get a semblance of my original wife back, I'll be the happiest man in the world, I can promise you that.

James presses the button even more times.

He RUNS out of the closet. Even though a stack of money-filled envelopes await him, he ignores them and exits the building.

EXT. UNMARKED BUILDING - CONT'D

James runs out to the parking lot to see that his car is gone. He looks around, confused, and starts SPRINTING back.

EXT. STREET - CONT'D

James runs through the busy street, but a man in a PINK SHIRT stops him.

PINK SHIRT
Holy shit- James Muller? Is that you?

JAMES
(confused)
Yes...

PINK SHIRT
Oh my GOD! Big fan... you know, when I was going through business school, your autobiography was like my bible. I used it as a model for my career path. And you're here! You're like Christ incarnate to me right now!
JAMES
Wait... huh?

PINK SHIRT
The way you fought your way to the top and took control of Stockton Industries just touched my heart.

JAMES
Stockton? That's... that's where I worked...

PINK SHIRT
Yeah, I know!

JAMES
...I gotta go...

PINK SHIRT
I understand. Go write more book-worthy material, man!

James runs and waves bye at him.

EXT. JAMES'S HOUSE - LATER

James tries to put his key in the door. He wiggles it, but he can't quite get it.

He sees that the window is open at the front. He climbs on a bunch of CHRYSANTHEMUMS on the front yard and goes in through the window.

INT. JAMES'S HOUSE - CONT'D

James jumps in and stands up. He looks around. Pictures of cats decorate the home, along with a candle on a windowsill.

He hears a door open and creak. A BALD MAN walks out with a shotgun pointed at James.

James PUTS UP his hands and walks backwards.

BALD MAN
Who do you think you are?

JAMES
Sorry, sorry, I'm just looking for my wife.
Bald Man
Well she ain't here, son. I recommend you move along before I call the police.

James
Do you know a Linda Burton?

Bald Man
I sure as hell don't, and she's gonna be crying when I unload this into your chest.

James quickly climbs back out of the house.

Ext. Sidewalk - Later

James walks around on a sidewalk. He wanders around aimlessly.

James
I'm beginning to regret all of this, Wyatt.

Wyatt
I'm sorry.

James
Nah, the fault's all mine. I just don't know how I go into this mess. Cause I was suicidal? Everyone's suicidal. I just can't deal with things like everyone else, can I? I just had to get fired up. I just had to ruin my career. I just had to take this opportunity.

Wyatt
James, I was once like you. I had questions about the prospects of a program like this. But I know now it can help us understand the underlying concepts of the universe better than we ever could without the use of some Multiverse technology.

James
Sure, but... wait...

James sees a library across the street.
WYATT
What?

JAMES
I need to find my wife first.

INT. LIBRARY - LATER
James is at a computer. He goes on FACEBOOK, where he looks up the name LINDA BURTON.

He finds her profile. Her picture is of her face, and she has "KITING" and "READING" under her interests.

Her PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT: UNDERTAKER COFFEE SHOP.
James logs out of the computer.

INT. UNDERTAKER COFFEE SHOP - LATER
A frazzled James walks into the decently busy coffee shop.

He spots Linda working at the counter. A long line is awaiting her service.

James walks to the back of the line.

WYATT
Jim, I know I've said this before and I'll say it to you again, this is a terrible decision. No good will come of it. Just try to let go of the personal connections you had before you started the experiment.

JAMES
And why would I do that?

WYATT
It'll just complicate things.

JAMES
I'll complicate everything before I'm willing to lose my wife.

After the first few customers get their orders in, James can't wait any longer. He cuts the entire line and walks up to Linda.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Linda!
Linda, a bit confused, looks at him.

LINDA
Do I know you?

JAMES
James Muller! Do you remember me?

Her eyes WIDEN.

LINDA
Oh my God. It's... it's you...

JAMES
Yeah, it's me!

LINDA
Get out of here.

JAMES
What?

LINDA
GET OUT OF HERE.

JAMES
Linda, what are you talking about?

LINDA
You don't remember?

James shakes his head. Linda scoffs.

LINDA (CONT'D)
You filthy son of a bitch. You betrayed me. When you moved up, you ditched me for good, because you could do better. You were a millionaire. I was NOTHING.

JAMES
Wait, Linda, I can explain-

LINDA
It's a little too late for that, Muller. When was this explanation when I had to go to therapy because you left me a miserable person? When was it while I cried myself to sleep while you showed up on the news and billboards and newspapers every day? Huh?

James stands there. He's devastated.
JAMES
But I wouldn't-

LINDA
Oh, but you did. You did and you
did it to the highest magnitude.
And now I'm going to have to ask
you to leave.

JAMES
Listen, that version of me wasn't
me! That was a version that was
terrible and hurtful and
disgusting! That's not me!

WYATT
Don't do it, Jim.

LINDA
What are you saying right now?!

JAMES
I was in this machine, it
teleported me to different places,
now I'm here. I'm a different
James!

LINDA
Get out!

The COFFEE SHOP OWNER comes out from the back.

COFFEE SHOP OWNER
Is this guy bothering you, Linda?

LINDA
Yes.

COFFEE SHOP OWNER
Sir, I'm going to have to ask you
to leave.

JAMES
You don't understand, I need to
explain something to her.

LINDA
I think you've explained enough.

COFFEE SHOP OWNER
If you don't leave, I'll have to
call the police.
JAMES
Fine. But whatever I did to hurt you, I can promise that wasn't the real me.

LINDA
Sure, James.

James leaves the coffee shop.

INT. DINER - LATER

James sits in the diner, eating a pancake. Melvin walks through the door and sits across from James.

JAMES
Hey Melvin. I need your help.

Melvin crosses his arms.

MELVIN
Really now?

JAMES
I need to be caught up on something. I don't know who I am.

MELVIN
I can't do this James.

JAMES
Why are you being like this?

MELVIN
Are you serious, James? After what you've done to me, you think I'll help you?

JAMES
I know I'm a bad person in this Universe.

MELVIN
No shit.

JAMES
But I'm not James from this universe. I don't know anything about myself. I don't know how I wronged you, or Linda, or anything I really did in the past.
MELVIN
You're fucking with me.

JAMES
I'm not, I'm really not!

MELVIN
So you have amnesia or something?

JAMES
...Sure...

MELVIN
I don't believe a shred of what you're saying.

JAMES
What can I do to convince you that I won't screw you over?

Melvin looks around and grabs a napkin. He takes out a pen from his coat and CLICKS it. He writes: "I, JAMES, PROMISE NOT TO FUCK MELVIN OVER USING THIS INFO."

James looks at Melvin's napkin. Melvin hands over the pen.

JAMES (CONT'D)
You've gotta be kidding me.

MELVIN
I guess you don't want information?

JAMES
Fine, fine.

James signs the napkin. Melvin takes it and folds it.

MELVIN
Assuming this is all true, I'll start from the beginning.

Melvin snaps his fingers at the Waitress. She comes over.

DINER WAITRESS
What can I get for you?

MELVIN
Dr. Pepper, extra ice.

DINER WAITRESS
That means you'll be getting less Dr. Pepper.
MELVIN
I understand that.

DINER WAITRESS
Good.
(to James)
Anything for you?

JAMES
I'm good.

She nods and leaves.

MELVIN
In college. We were good friends.

JAMES
I know. Start from... start from when the betrayal was. Did we work together? At the Stockton company?

MELVIN
We did, actually. You and I, we tore that place up. Promotion after promotion... it was great. But after a while, things slowed down. Sales dropped a bit, but they were still okay. But you didn't get enough. You wanted more. More and more and more. So you start your own company. Start wearing fancier suits, start making cool ads. Obviously you quit your job at that point, but you offered me a job at your company. Except we wouldn't be partners... I would be your employee.

JAMES
Jesus...

MELVIN
Yeah, it gets worse. I reject, but nicely. And then you just took over. My job, the company... all left in the dust. I couldn't do it.

JAMES
You know Linda?

MELVIN
Of course I knew Linda. I feel much worse for her than I ever will for myself.

(MORE)
MELVIN (CONT’D)
She catches you with a hooker. Not even a good one, if I remember -- you beg and you beg, until finally she forgives you. She takes you back, that poor soul. And eventually you guys are happy for about a year. And then the phone call. Oh, the phone call. It's a drunken rampage. You call her a bitch, a whore. It's awful.

JAMES
Fuck.

James puts his face in his hands.

MELVIN
That shit goes viral: internet, news outlets, fucking everywhere. Eventually you leave her because you can't handle the embarrassment. You leave her in the dust. You go low-key for a while. Until eventually, you come back in a big way. Powerful and bigger than anyone could ever have imagined. They called you a "Gorilla," I always found that a bit stupid. Anyway, everyone started loving you. You upgraded from millionaire to billionaire, and everyone forgot about that whole business with Linda. And here we are now.

JAMES
I have a weird question, Melvin.

MELVIN
Shoot.

JAMES
Do I have a kid?

MELVIN
What?

JAMES
You heard me. Do I have a kid?

MELVIN
Not that I know of, no. But after all the prostitutes and quickfire relationships I wouldn't be surprised.
James gently rests his forehead against the table.

JAMES
Uunnnnnnngh.

MELVIN
Don't worry though. In the eyes of the public, you're flawless.

JAMES
I don't give a shit about what the public thinks.

MELVIN
Didn't think I'd ever hear those words coming out of your mouth.

INT. JEWELRY STORE - LATER
James stands around and sees a nice watch in the display.
The Owner walks up to him.

JEWELRY SHOP OWNER
See anything you like?

JAMES
That looks nice.
James takes his wallet out.

EXT. UNDERTAKER COFFEE SHOP - AFTERNOON
James sits in his car, watching the back door of the coffee shop from a distance.

He sees Linda walk out of the coffee shop. James gets out of the car and begins to walk over, but sees a guy in his 30's put his arm over Linda's shoulder.

James stops for a bit, but he then keeps going. He comes up to them.

JAMES
Hey.

Linda and LEONARD (her boyfriend) turn around.

LINDA
Oh my God!
LEONARD
Who's this guy, Linda?

LINDA
Don't even give him the satisfaction.

LEONARD
He seems like he really wants to talk to you.

JAMES
I do. Linda, I'm sorry. For everything I did. I apologize. The pain you felt... I can't even imagine. I'm a huge dick, and I am so sorry. Disregard everything I said in that coffee shop. You deserve better.

LEONARD
Deep, man.

JAMES
And if you ever have a kid, could you do me a favor?

James pulls the watch out of his pocket and holds it out to Linda.

JAMES (CONT'D)
If you ever have a kid, could you give this to them?

Beat.

LINDA
Sure.

JAMES
Thank you.

EXT. CURB - LATER

James sits on a curb, looking down at a puddle. His eyes are bright red. He's been crying. He puts on his headset.

WYATT
Yes?

JAMES
Hey Wyatt.
WYATT
Hey Jim.

JAMES
I'm scared. I'm lonely. You're the only one I really actually know anymore.

WYATT
I can understand that.

JAMES
Tell me what to do, Wyatt.

WYATT
I don't really know, James.

JAMES
Could I ask you something that might be a little personal?

WYATT
Sure.

JAMES
How did you get here? And how have you been following me around? I mean, every Universe I go everything seems to change, but you... you always stay the same.

WYATT
You wanna know the truth?

JAMES
Yes.

WYATT
I was in your shoes at one point.

INT. GOVERNMENT OFFICE BUILDING - SAME

WYATT (25) sits at a desk, talking into a bigger headset.

WYATT
I was also a subject for one of these tests. They were surprised at how much I understood the intricacies of the Multiverse. They then realized I was much more useful to them as an employee for this department.
JAMES (V.O.)
I guess they liked you.

WYATT
Maybe more like "annoyed by my fake ingenuity."

James chuckles.

JAMES
I can't handle this anymore, Wyatt.

WYATT
What?

JAMES
I'm lonely. My wife hates me. My kid doesn't fucking exist. My best friend was betrayed by me.

Beat.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I'm going to kill myself.

WYATT
James, that won't fix anything...

JAMES
Nobody else will be hurt by me.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - LATER
James walks by, and sees that the WATCH was on the ground. He looks at it, and he throws it on the ground, cracking the watch face.

James SCREAMS into the air. He's failed. Everything he's tried to do to connect to his old life has failed.

And now it's time for something drastic.

INT. JANITOR'S CLOSET - EVENING
James SPRINTS into the Janitor's Closet.

JAMES
Wyatt, you gotta help me. What do I do?
WYATT
I'm not sure I know what you're asking...

JAMES
My kid is gone, my wife doesn't exist, nothing makes sense anymore!

WYATT
You're just in a world where they don't exist.

JAMES
Give me the world where they exist, goddammit! Give it back!

WYATT
James, I'm sorry, I just-

JAMES
You LISTEN you son of a bitch! I know whoever you work for has the capability to do fuck all! You're playing God, Wyatt! And right now I'm hoping for some ethereal salvation or some shit!

WYATT
Please, relax Jim...

JAMES
Who the FUCK do you think I am?! Everything I love is GONE!

WYATT
Don't do anything crazy...

Jim SLAMS the button. CLICK. He does it again. CLICK. And again and again and again. CLICK CLICK CLICK.

JAMES
Why isn't this firing? Why doesn't it fire? Why has it NEVER FIRED?!

WYATT
Jim... I have to tell you-

JAMES
Fuck off, man.

James leans against the wall. He rests against the wires.

WYATT
Jim?
JAMES
I don't know what's happening anymore. What's happening? I can't do this. I can't do any of this. Take me back Wyatt. I'm begging you.

WYATT
Jim, I'm sorry. That's impossible. The machine only takes you to other multiverses, we can't decide which one to take you to.

JAMES
You can track me and find me and know everything about me, yet you can't just make this all go away?

WYATT
We're not God, Jim.

James stands up.

JAMES
Why hasn't it fired? I mean, it seems improbable that it never would. Like the roulette table, right? What's the chances it ALWAYS comes up red? Never black? How could that be possible?

A long pause of silence. James KNOCKS his headset.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Hello?

WYATT
I can't do this anymore.

JAMES
What?

WYATT
Lie to you. Jim... if I tell you this, so please understand if I get cut off.

JAMES
What are you talking about?

WYATT
Jim, there are millions of version of you. Trillions. Infinite. That's a side effect of the multiverse.
JAMES
And?

WYATT
Jim, you're the one that can't be shot.

JAMES
What are you talking about?

WYATT
You cannot be shot by the gun.
Death in this room is impossible.
In fact, death by any gun is impossible. That's why you couldn't get shot when you were mugged. The company I worked for determined the universe in which you would never get shot. Your life was destined to never end by gunfire.

JAMES
What makes you say that?

WYATT
Years and years of research, specifically on your life. The men watching you? They were studying you. Your life. Your personality. They were determining whether you would achieve Quantum Immortality.

James takes out a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket. He flattens it out to reveal the diagram explaining Quantum Immortality.

JAMES
How can that be...

WYATT
I don't have much time. It's all a sham. You were never going to die. We needed a subject who would experience these changes and we needed to find out the effects on the psyche. We were out to ruin you to begin with. Forgive me. Please forgi-

INT. GOVERNMENT OFFICE BUILDING - SAME

Wyatt is being pulled from his desk from two government agents.
WYATT
No, what are you doing? Stop! Jim, run far! Run far away from this place! Live!

INT. JANITOR'S CLOSET - SAME

WYATT (V.O.)
Live your life out! Don't let this experiment shackle you down! Don't-

BEEEEEEEEEP.

JAMES
Wyatt?

Nothing.

JAMES (CONT'D)

WYATT?!

A Robotic Voice comes on.

ROBOTIC VOICE
We're sorry, your connection with our Human Guide: WYATT, was terminated. Reason: Lack of Discretion by Human Guide. We apologize for the inconvenience.

JAMES
No no no no...

James looks at the button, and keeps PRESSING it.

CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-

JAMES (CONT'D)

NO!

CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-

James COLLAPSES on the floor. He curls up in a ball, and starts sobbing.

JAMES (CONT'D)

(whispering to himself)
It's okay to be vulnerable. It's okay to be vulnerable. It's okay to be vulnerable.
INT. OFFICE - DAY
James TYPES on his computer. The Secretary walks up behind him and taps him on the shoulder.

SECRETARY
The Manager would like to see you.

JAMES
Oh, Okay.

INT. OFFICE - MANAGER'S OFFICE - CONT'D
The office has a desk decorated only by a Newton's Cradle, like before. The Manager stands up and holds out his hand.

MANAGER
Mr. Muller! I'm the new office manager, I've heard a lot about you.

James shakes the Manager's hand.

JAMES
Good things, I hope.

MANAGER
We'll get to that.

The Manager lifts a ball on the Newton's Cradle, and lets it go. CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-

James stops the Newton's Cradle by holding his hand against the end of it.

JAMES
Sorry, I just can't converse very well with that going.

MANAGER
Oh, I understand.

JAMES
So, are you here to fire me?

MANAGER
(chuckles)
Oh no, not at all.
(MORE)
MANAGER (CONT’D)
In fact, I'd say the opposite. You are moving up in this company. The parent company took a look at your history with this branch and we've decided that you've gone too long being too loyal without any kind of upgrade.

JAMES
Wow. I was not expecting this.

MANAGER
We've decided to make you Junior Vice President of the branch. It comes with an eighteen thousand dollar pay raise.

JAMES
Say that again?

MANAGER
Eighteen thousand.

James takes a DEEP breath.

JAMES
That's a lot to take in.

MANAGER
Certainly.

JAMES
I'm taking it.

MANAGER
Great!

The Manager and James shake hands.

INT. JAMES'S HOUSE - LATER
James BURSTS through the doors. Linda runs out.

LINDA
What happened?

JAMES
Good news!

Caleb runs up to him.

CALEY
Daddy!
James SWOOPS Caleb off the ground.

   JAMES
   Oh, you're a big boy!

James puts Caleb down. James then kisses Linda.

   JAMES (CONT'D)
   Good news. I got a pay raise.
   Eighteen thousand a year.

   LINDA
   Oh my God...

   JAMES
   We can pay everything off so much quicker.

   LINDA
   Yes! And I can quit my job!

   JAMES
   Everything will be alright. It'll be okay.

Linda gives James a tight embrace.

   LINDA
   It'll be okay.

INT. JAMES'S HOUSE - BEDROOM

James goes into his room and takes off his tie. In the corner of the closet, he sees a shoebox.

He takes it out of the closet, and opens it to see the dirty, old, gray sneakers staring back at him. He takes them out and looks at them.

   JAMES
   Hello my old friend...

He looks at it. The shoelaces are all frayed. It's barely holding itself together.

James takes both the shoes and THROWS them in a wastebasket.

INT. JAMES'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - LATER

James and Linda clean up the table after a meal.
JAMES
How was your day?

LINDA
Better when you came home.

The doorbell RINGS.

JAMES
I'll get it.

EXT. JAMES'S HOUSE - CONT'D

James looks outside, and sees the cardboard package addressed to JAMES MULLER.

JAMES
Honey?

LINDA (O.S.)
Yeah?

JAMES
Did you order something?

LINDA
I don't think so.

James takes the package inside.

INT. JAMES'S HOUSE - CONT'D

James opens the box to see the contents, a Bluetooth headset, an envelope of information, and a note saying "Congratulations! You have been selected for a special government program."

James looks at the paper, and puts it back in the box.

EXT. JAMES'S HOUSE - CONT'D

James tosses the box on his front yard. It lands next to the LILACS planted in his front yard.

END.